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THE NEW HERMENEUTIC

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CORNELIUS VAN TIL

THINK AGAIN

PERSONAL STUDY NOTES

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Preface

When Karl Barth first published his Commentary on Romans theologians of every color took up their position in relation to it. Here was an obviously learned and brilliant theologian who thought he could be “modern” and, at the same time, true to Reformation theology. Barth himself was surprised at this. He was, he says, like a boy who, climbing into the church steeple, fell down and happened to catch the rope of the church bells, causing them to ring out at an unusual time, and arousing the populace to wondering what was transpiring.

The New Hermeneutic of such men as Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling has done something similar in recent decades to what Barth did in the early twenties. These men seek to be both more modern and more Reformational than Barth was in his day. Theologians of various schools are taking their positions in relation to this New Hermeneutic as their forbearers did in relation to Barth.

The present volume is doing the same. In earlier publications the present writer pointed out that the synthesis between a theology based on that of the Reformers and a theology based on the philosophy of Kant is an intellectual and spiritual monstrosity. In it Kant, not Calvin is the real victor. The result is the destruction of an intelligible basis for human predication. What is needed is a really Reformational philosophy and theology. Only if we have this can

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the depth of the contrast between the self-attesting Christ of the Scripture and the Christ-Event of neo-orthodoxy be seen for what it is

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¹Van Til, C. (1974). *The New Hermeneutic*. The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company: Phillipsburg, NJ.

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²Van Til, C. (1974). *The New Hermeneutic*. The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company: Phillipsburg, NJ.

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Chapter 1:

Its Main Representatives

The chief representatives of the “New Hermeneutic” are Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling. Both of these men have obliged us by setting forth their views in brief, lucidly written, articles. These articles are found in Volume 2 of *New Frontiers in Theology*, edited by James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. We shall listen first to Fuchs and then to Ebeling.

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A. Ernst Fuchs

The title of Fuchs' article is "The New Testament and the Hermeneutical Problem." Fuchs relates briefly the story of the development of his thinking. As a child he learned "a series of Bible verses each year at school." He entertained no particular doubts "about the truth of this Bible teaching." He was, he says, "happy over every pious word, if it made sense. To be sure," he says, "I always posed this condition, and I hope I still do today. Pious words should not be stupid."¹

Is not this what the New Hermeneutic is all about? Rightly interpreted the message of the New Testament must make sense to modern man.

It was Professor Adolf Schlatter who, says Fuchs, first helped him to see this point. Then, in 1924, Fuchs met the Marburg Professor Rudolf Bultmann. "Meanwhile, Karl Barth had risen as a new star on the theological horizon, and Bultmann turned to him with a passion." But Barth "was no master of historical criticism." And how can one really see that the New Testament message makes sense without the help of historical criticism? How can one really carry on historical criticism unless it be in terms of an intelligible view of man and his relation to the universe? Fortunately, "shortly before, in 1923, the

¹ D. Ernst Fuchs, "The New Testament and the Hermeneutical Problem," in *New Frontiers in Theology*, Volume 2, *The New Hermeneutic*, ed. James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 2:112.

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philosopher Martin Heidegger had come to Marburg.” “A new academic era had begun.” “Now imagine for a moment the young student with all these influences working upon him: Schlatter, Bultmann, Heidegger, and behind the latter two, Karl Barth.”²

1. The New Problematics

It is with the problematics of this new academic era, says Fuchs, that the New Hermeneutic concerns itself. Particularly we must grapple with the problems not fully solved by such men as Barth and Bultmann. The first and most basic of these problems pertains to the question of the historical Jesus.

Bultmann has helped us to see that the question about the historical Jesus is not: which of his words are “authentic” and which acts of Jesus actually happened. Rather, what is decisive is the fact that such things should be narrated at all. What does this interest of the evangelists in the historical Jesus mean?”³

The problematics of the new theological era are not to be identified with those of nineteenth century Liberalism. Recent phenomenology and existential philosophy, notably that of Heidegger, have taught us that the facts of Kant’s phenomenal world are of secondary and derivative importance. The basic questions pertain to the facts of Kant’s noumenal realm. Liberal theologians sought to make sense of

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

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the message of the New Testament by reducing it to the I-it dimension, the dimension of science and of history. They did not adequately sense the fact that by their program they tended to reduce the free, authentic self of man to an instance of an impersonal law. In debating with the fundamentalists about such things as the objective historicity of the resurrection of Christ the Liberals only manifested the fact that they had not fully liberated themselves from the determinism involved in the orthodox view of God and his relation to man and the world.

To be sure, Liberalism was reformable while orthodoxy was not. Liberal theologians like Friedrich Schleiermacher and Albrecht Ritschl took their view of man and his freedom from Immanuel Kant. In taking over Kant's view of man's freedom they also adopted his view of the ultimate contingency of all reality as back of all the categories, both impersonal and personal, with which man interprets himself and his environment. But it was not till modern phenomenism and existentialism appeared that the full significance of Kant's philosophy could be appreciated. It was only when foundational thinkers like Heidegger brought to light the glorious vision of man as a free and authentic being in the face of pure contingency, that the shackles of a view of truth as coming to man in a final and finished form could be cast off. Now, at last, in our time Barth and especially Bultmann have been able to show us that the gospel of the New Testament makes sense to modern man.

2. Beyond Bultmann

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But have they? Yes, says Fuchs, they have indeed. Even so, their vision remains dim. They did, not quite, know what to do with the historical Jesus.

This inability on the part of Barth and Bultmann to deal properly with the historical Jesus springs from their inadequate appreciation of the “historicness” (*Geschichtlichkeit*) of man. Fuchs asks the question: “Could our conception of the historical be in need of correction?” He answers: “This is indeed my opinion.”

Only by a correction of Bultmann’s idea of the historical can we visualize and confront “a new problem, the problem of hermeneutic.” This new problem comes into view only if we realize that “we should note facts even more carefully than we are accustomed to do in the practice of exegesis and preaching.”⁴

To note the facts in the gospels “more carefully” does not mean for Fuchs that we must return to the position of old liberalism. On the contrary, it means rather that we must carry forth Bultmann’s program of demythologizing more consistently than Bultmann has done. When the New Testament says that Jesus was “a pre-existent heavenly being,” that “after his resurrection he rules together with God at God’s right hand,” that during his life-time he walked on water “like a spirit” and that “he was conceived by the Holy Spirit without male participation” we know, with Bultmann, that this is mythical language.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

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How is all this mythical language to be intelligible and useful to us?

(a) On Demythologization and an Existential Interpretation

To seek to answer this question is our “hermeneutical task.”⁵ Bultmann speaks of this task as that of existential interpretation. Our question now is, argues Fuchs, whether Bultmann has carried out his program of existential interpretation with sufficient courage and consistency.

Obviously, the problem and the task of hermeneutic are aspects of one larger, all-comprehensive program of “making sense” out of the mythologically stated message of the New Testament.

Let us then seek to demythologize this message more consistently than Bultmann has done because we can now reinterpret it more existentially than Bultmann was able to do.

First we ask whether Bultmann did not hold on to a mythology of his own in his conception of the “Easter Faith.” “With many scholars” Bultmann “holds the opinion that Jesus awaited the kingdom of God in the near future.” Such a conception was mythical of course. Was it right to hold on to this mythical conception “in order then to hang on it the problem of the ‘delay’ of the *parousia*?” Is something negative, something which could never come to pass, supposed to have brought the whole

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

development into action? With what right does one elevate over against that the preaching of the resurrection of Jesus as something different, as the message of an act of God. Would then two quite different things have been mixed up with each other: (1) as a backdrop, a mythical expectation which failed; (2) the claim of an act of God, instead, of the expected concept and presumably not derivable from it? Would then the mythical expectation have been corrected by God's act at Easter? Can one still call such a procedure demythologizing? Would it not be more nearly correct to demythologize the so-called "Easter faith" as well, and prior to that Jesus expectation?"⁶

Secondly, we must go beyond Bultmann's conception of existential interpretation. To go beyond Bultmann on the point of demythologizing means to deny more consistently than Bultmann had done the direct revelational significance of any of the "facts" related in the New Testament. Having denied the direct revelational significance of any of the "facts," Fuchs sets us free to attribute existential significance to all of them. It is this that sets faith free to be itself. Faith's experiences, notably that of the forgiveness of sins, can now be made to count for what they are. Moreover, these experiences can now be intelligently related to the life and notably to the death of Jesus.

(b) On the Experience of Faith

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

“What experience does faith have?” asks Fuchs, and adds: “This question finally brings me to the point decisive for my theological work.”⁷ Having carried out the task of demythologizing consistently, the whole of the gospel narrative is brilliantly lit up for us as the gospel of sovereign, universal grace. If we have once seen the fact that “What is decisive is not in the first place the content, but the fact that Jesus spoke at all” then we can “come to grips with the content of his preaching.”

This preaching “is not a conglomeration of more or less unrelated views, but it is first all word, language, exhortation, as Bultmann rightly says. What is the essential thing in this exhortation? Among other things it is surely this: A person is called upon to listen and is told he has to listen with regard to himself.”⁸

Jesus desires faith in him on the part of those whom he addresses. They must “be willing to be told that now the time has come in which God comes forward as God.” It is God’s presence with them that they must accept and respond to in obedience. “This presence” of God with us, “connects our action with God’s action.”⁹

I now see that “my action as love flows from love to God (Mk 12:28–34). For I can really love God from now on, I can rejoice in him, since Jesus has made God present for me. And how has he done that? Through his words, which now lie like

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

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Christmas presents on the table. What we should put on—so to speak, what we should clothe ourselves with—are indeed Jesus’ words themselves. And clothed in them we should henceforth carry on our daily life. It will have become a completely new life.”¹⁰

This new life is the “kernel of Christian faith.” The new life is “the sphere of the word in which Jesus moved.” And this sphere of the word in which Jesus moved is the sphere of our daily life. It is the sphere of supreme love as lived in a family. And love in a family finds its climactic expression in the face of a death in the family. “Death belongs to daily life. It is the guest in our inn, perhaps often even the innkeeper, a bartender and a drink-mixer. But did not Jesus call for love, because now in the time of the kingdom of God it has become universally possible? What then does love say to death? Does love keep silent about it? I do not think so!” Just read the parables of Jesus. They “resist death. They lead into eternal life. Is it not so? Do they not speak, as Bultmann puts it, ‘on this side and beyond time’?”¹¹

In the face of death man is helpless. But through love we are in the Father’s house, namely at home. In the Father’s house death is God’s problem and “God’s problem” is “the problem of how to see to it that love prevails.”¹² Our faith therefore “takes comfort in the might and power of God ...” Our faith “indeed insists on this power in the present because

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 134.

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it believes.” Love is, therefore, “properly called the work of God.”

Moreover, our faith proclaims the lordship of Jesus in the world about us as well as in ourselves:

Thus everything comes to a head in this: If Jesus made the voice of love to count, and thus made God himself count, then he wanted his hearers to do this too.¹³

Herewith, says Fuchs, we return to the “historical Jesus.” “Jesus himself had been God’s word to which all clung, for Jesus did not want to be or to be understood as anything other than God’s word which entered into his daily life and began here its work. He was this word, for he let himself be heard at precisely that place where God himself had begun to speak. Jesus was God’s word, if at that time the time for this word had come! And that is what faith in Jesus believes, by believing in the historical Jesus. This alone is the true meaning of ‘Easter faith.’ Jesus and those who believe through him belong forever together. For this reason they believe in him by confessing him as God’s word, indeed as God’s ‘verb’ God’s ‘time-word.’ ”¹⁴

If we have faith we say: “if love is right-then death is wrong.” Then, “death cannot be the true ‘limit’ of our life. One must draw the consequences of all this. That is the hermeneutic which I envisage. I concentrate on language. And I concentrate on it as it is challenged by death. Death at the grave mocks

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

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the survivors. 'Now you speak!' And to this one must answer: 'Love is the victor.' This statement is a postulate. And this postulate is the postulate of faith: Love wishes for me, precisely when I am confronted with death, that I believe that love is victorious, not death. That is not possible without God. But with God it is a matter of course. This is the way Jesus thought. But Paul did not think differently."¹⁵

When the scientist scoffingly asks me: "So you believe in a life after death?" I answer: "Yes, I believe it; because God has said A, he will also say B." And "to be strengthened in this faith I seek where God has said A. I look to all the possibilities of genuine love. And now I for my part shade the natural sciences out of daily life, and I train myself in the genuine language of daily life. There certainty prevails. And there, in that atmosphere of respect with which genuine persons avoid prying into the secret of God, I can overcome say, the deep pain owing to the loss of loved ones. Here I experience that love's A there is again and again love's B. And I depend on this arrangement. I train myself in it. Then there is a point in talking about God's work."¹⁶

(c) On Understanding the New Testament

We now "understand the New Testament again." "It is not as if the 'facts' should be despised!" But they should be returned to that language to which they belong, when we think of our concrete life between morning and evening. And if we draw back

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

in fear, then it is only because we notice that we have lost our language. But here the New Testament intervenes again. The New Testament is itself a textbook in hermeneutic. It teaches the hermeneutic of faith—in brief—the language of faith—and it encourages us to try this language ourselves, so that we may become familiar with—God.”¹⁷

The New Testament now “shines brighter and brighter the more difficult daily life becomes. God intends to remain God. Perhaps this is the fundamental hermeneutical statement precisely for our time.”¹⁸

(d) Love is God

Let one then “replace the word love with the word ‘God.’ ” Then one has understood that faith in God is the most natural thing that there can be. And it readily makes sense to our practical reason. On the other hand, it does not make sense that death should dictate to us what we are to think.”¹⁹

Here then, in very brief compass we have the main notions of the New Hermeneutic, as Fuchs thinks of it. It is obvious, even from this brief survey, that Fuchs rejects the historic, orthodox view of Christianity and, notably that of historic Protestantism. A genuine faith, a faith that requires no *sacrificium intellectus*, a faith, that “makes sense” does not believe in Jesus as the direct revelation of

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

God.²⁰ Genuine faith does not engage in argument with fundamentalists about the supposed historical objectivity of the fact of Jesus' resurrection. It does not engage in argument with scientists who assume that the phenomenal world, the world of the impersonal relationships, is the final standard of what is possible for man. Building on Kant's notion of the primacy of practical reason the New Hermeneutic of Fuchs identifies God with the victory of love and this love is found to be manifest, especially in Jesus' life and in his death on the cross.

3. Hermeneutik

We now take brief note of Fuchs' work on *Hermeneutik*. This work was first published in 1954. It contains the first major expression of the New Hermeneutic.

We must, says Fuchs again, take a critical look at Bultmann's demythologizing program. We must not merely demythologize the text of the New Testament. Rather we must demythologize the human self in the light of its text. Only if we demythologize the self in the light of the New Testament text do we catch what is meant by hermeneutic. Hermeneutic then shows itself as Being the:

A. Sprachlehre Des Glaubens

What then does the New Testament text tell us about ourselves?

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

Fuchs' view of this is found clearly in his discussion of the prologue of John's gospel. James M. Robinson deals with this discussion. Says Robinson: "Fuchs begins with the famous translation by Faust, 'in the beginning was the deed.' This is then corrected, on the basis of John 13:34 (the 'new commandment' to love), to the translation 'in the beginning was love ...' Then in view of John 4:16 (God is love), 'love becomes the translation for *theos* rather than for *logos*. 'In the beginning was the word, and the word was with love, and the word was love.'"²¹

B. The Language Event as Saving Event

On the basis of this exegesis of the prologue of John, Fuchs tells us what he understands by Hermeneutic. Says Fuchs: "In the supplement to my Hermeneutik I made the attempt to understand word as that Yes that forestalls and precedes every No, as the Yes ultimately constitutive of every language event. For word is, after all, language; it speaks as its very nature. In genuine language do we not, even before any affirmation, say simply this Yes, when we speak? And even more: With our language do we not correspond from the very first to a Yes that grants us entry, entry into that being in which we are with ourselves and yet precisely not left alone. Even though language usually alienates itself from the word, its ground, and builds all sorts of words that are only signs, does it not still in its own-most ground live from that Yes that is the word of all words? To be sure language would then be

²¹James M. Robinson, "Hermeneutic since Barth" in *New Frontiers in Theology*, 2:60.

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originally the language of God, and its basic trail would then rightly be named love.”²²

On this passage Robinson remarks: “Perhaps nowhere more clearly than here does one hear the sense in which the ‘saving event’ is a ‘language-event’, since language when it is true language, is God’s saving word. And perhaps nowhere more clearly than here does one hear the central role of language in a new theology that has its two loci in the historic Jesus and hermeneutic. For the ‘historic Jesus’ is heard, not as ‘objective factuality’, but as ‘word of address’; and ‘hermeneutic’ is heard not as ‘understanding in speechless profundity’, but as ‘translation into language that speaks today.’ Thus hermeneutic is the method suited to the ‘historic Jesus,’ and the historic Jesus is the material point of departure for a recovery of valid hermeneutic.”²³

It should be noted that both Bultmann and Fuchs express indebtedness for their views to Heidegger. But Bultmann, we are often told, attaches his theological program of demythologizing and existential interpretation to Heidegger’s earlier work, while Fuchs attaches his program of hermeneutical interpretation to Heidegger’s later work.²⁴ An excellent discussion of this matter is found in James M. Robinson’s article “The German Discussion of the Later Heidegger” in *New Frontiers in Theology* Volume 1.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 60–61.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

²⁴ For the writer’s view of Heidegger’s later work see his pamphlet: *The Later Heidegger and Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1964.)

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C. The Later Heidegger and the Silent Toll of Being

The basic question from which Heidegger starts and to which he frequently comes back is: why there are beings at all and not simply nothing. This is the question of being. It is the question of man and of his understanding of himself in relation to his ultimate environment.

Man must seek to understand himself as the loud-speaker for the silent toll of being.” When he fulfills his role then he is truly man. This idea of man cannot be expressed directly in words taken from ordinary surface-phenomenal life. Neither science nor metaphysics comes within sight of such a view of man. What is needed is a vision of that which absolutely transcends everything that any man has ever said on the basis of empirical experience or conceptual thinking. It takes the poets to give ordinary men such insights. Fortunately every man is at heart a poet. Deep down in his inmost self everyman knows that his true authentic self is the free self as it participates in the noumenal, the numinous, the wholly other. It is his participation in this purely transcendent being that makes him see that the poets are basically right when they, often with tortured verbiage, point all men to their true home which, in their forgetfulness of being, they have left behind.

Seeing the vision that the poets see, men long to return to their original home. Hearing the words the poets speak they hear the words of love and understanding. They understand the language of

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faith, of love and of hope. Their real, their authentic being, is their future being. It is this future being that is the true origin of their being. They are what they are because of what they will be. What they are is what they must be.

In his *Vom Wesen des Grundes* (1929) Heidegger takes up the question of the goal or purpose of man's life (*Ermöglichung der Warumfrage überhaupt*).²⁵ When we ask why anything exists rather than nothing, we are, by implication, also asking what we can do with the idea of purpose. We use this idea in everyday life. But can we speak of a purpose of being? The answer is that we must do so. To be sure, we cannot speak of purpose in terms of the subject-object relation, i.e., in terms of the surface-phenomenal realm of space and time. But the poets lead us into a realm of transcendence above the phenomenal. They do this by teaching us a method of understanding that is far above the method of conceptual manipulation. We must think of purpose not as a concept based on empirical experience, a concept which, after the manner of natural theology leads us up to an absolute Purpose. We must rather think of purpose as the origin, the ground and goal of all beings.

Of course this true origin and goal or purpose of beings always remains hidden. Nothing can be said about it conceptually. So long as you try to say anything about it conceptually you are still lost in the midst of the forgetfulness of being. To have a true

²⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Vom Wesen Des Grundes* (Frankfort: Vittorio Klostermann, 1929). p. 48.

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understanding of being, is to live in the light of that being (*der Helle des Seinsverständnisses*).²⁶

In 1946 Heidegger wrote *Über den Humanismus*. In it he works out further the idea that man's true self-understanding is identical with his proper understanding of Being (*Seinsverständnis*). Man must be seen for what he is as standing in the truth of being.²⁷ Man is what he is because he is thrown into the truth of Being. As such he must be a watchman of being. A watchman may be unfaithful. If he is then he is untrue to the truth of Being, in which, as man, he stands.

In *Was Heisst Denken* Heidegger deals in comprehensive fashion with the difference between the type of thinking, used in the past, by science and metaphysics and the type of thinking that he recommends. Parmenides was not wrong in thinking that thinking and being are involved in one another. His mistake lay in the fact that he had no vision of true transcendence and therefore no vision of the fact that genuine understanding of Being is and always will be a matter of supraconceptual participation in Being as wholly transcendent and therefore as omnipresent. Parmenides had no appreciation for the fact that the one to be really one, must never be conceptually attainable and that the many, to be really many, must never be empirically identifiable. To have true self-understanding is to have poetic awareness of the fact that somehow

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

²⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Über Den Humanismus* (Frankfort: Vittorio Klostermann, 1946). p. 19.

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Being speaks to him and through him. Thus he is the loudspeaker of the silent toll of Being.

D. Self-Understanding

Fuchs is of the opinion that Bultmann did not do adequate justice to the notion of self-understanding. Bultmann did not exploit Heidegger's later thinking for the benefit of theology. Surely theologians are remiss in their task if they do not show how the Being of Heidegger is really the God of Christianity and how faith in Christ is really identical with man's true self-understanding.

We have already seen how Fuchs exegetes the prologue of the gospel of John in the interest of accomplishing this purpose. We turn now to an article he wrote on "Why Faith in Jesus Christ Requires Self-understanding." This article was written in 1951.

(1) The Easter Faith

In this article Fuchs deals especially with the question of Easter faith. Bultmann, he argues again, was unable to do full justice to the idea of our faith in the resurrection of Christ because he did not grasp the opportunity of giving a Christological interpretation to Heidegger's notion of self-understanding.

(2) Vergangenheit Des Todes

To believe in the resurrection of Christ is to have true self-understanding and to have true self-

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understanding is to believe in the resurrection of Christ.²⁸

Heidegger was right in saying that man's being is being unto death. But, as we have heard, Fuchs say he trains himself in the language of love and love is stronger than death. Through faith in the resurrection of Christ we exercise ourselves in the pastness of death (*Vergangenheit des Todes*). "On that everything depends."²⁹ Why then does faith in Jesus Christ require our self-understanding? Because he is the vine and we are the branches. He is the head, we are the members. He is what we are to be, that is, What God intended for us in Adam. This is the message of the resurrection for us. Self-understanding is what it is inasmuch as our real self is what it is because it will be what it will be in the ever contingent resurrection event of Christ.

(3) Christ as Our Origin and Goal

In the chapter on The Biblical View of Man Fuchs makes the same general point by saying that rightly understood Christ is our Origin. Did not Christ conquer death? Are we not one with him in his resurrection?³⁰ Does not Paul tell us that we live in the Spirit? In Christ, in the Spirit, in the Word God

²⁸ D. Ernst Fuchs, *Zum Hermeneutischen Problem In Der Theologie* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1959, p. 225. "Auferstehung ist Auferstehungsgeschehen. Das Auferstehungsgeschehen ist zugleich das Geschehen, das als Glaube in der Welt erscheint. Der Glaube wird als Glaube eingeubt. Die Einubung des Glaubens ist Einubung der Auferstehung."

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 277–278.

speaks his Yes to man and with Christ man speaks his Yes to his fellowman.

In view of the fact that Christ is our Origin we realize that man is what he is as called by this Origin to his end, to his true future. Man is truly man when he responds to the call of his Origin and Goal, Jesus Christ.

Taking all these matters into consideration Robinson again says that for Fuchs “hermeneutic is the method suited to the historic Jesus and the historic Jesus is the material point of departure for a recovery of valid hermeneutic.” Fuchs is of the opinion with a number of his contemporaries, that neither Barth nor Bultmann have done justice to the basic significance of the historic—or historical Jesus. The reason for this fact was that they operated with an inadequate hermeneutical principle. The call of the moment is, therefore, to go beyond both of these men by means of a new hermeneutical principle. The newness of this new hermeneutical principle is found in the fact that it is what it is because it is correlative to the idea of the historical Jesus and because the historical Jesus is what it is because it is correlative to the new hermeneutical principle. “This hermeneutic is the method suited to the historic Jesus, and the historic Jesus is the material point of departure for a recovery of a valid hermeneutic.”³¹

The method of the new hermeneutic is, accordingly, all comprehensive. Christian faith stands or falls with the historical Jesus. But we

³¹ Robinson, “Hermeneutic since Barth,” p. 61.

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cannot know the historical Jesus except as correlative to the method of the new hermeneutic. This interdependence of historical Jesus and the new hermeneutic is built upon the presupposition that all reality is historic (*Geschichtlich*). It was impossible to see all this so long as the historical Jesus was interpreted in terms of the dogmatic Christ of the creed, notably of the Chalcedon creed. The Reformers did not have the vision of the historicness of existence and therefore did not have the vision of the historical Jesus as correlative to a hermeneutic as presupposing the historicness of reality. Only now, on the basis of the work of such men as Kant and Heidegger, have we seen what history really is. Only now can we understand the Jesus of history and his saving significance for mankind.

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B. Gerhard Ebeling

We turn now to Gerhard Ebeling, a younger contemporary and friend of Fuchs.

The general viewpoint of Ebeling is similar to that of Fuchs. There is in Ebeling the same interest in the historical Jesus that we find in Fuchs. “The question of the relation between Jesus and faith affects the heart of Christology, and indeed the prime datum of Christian enigmatics as such. It is the cardinal point of the whole account of what Christianity really means. For there is no doubt that what makes Christian is faith in Jesus Christ. And the one basic problem of Christology is precisely the meaning of the statement, ‘I believe in Jesus.’” The task of theology is “to give an account of the statement ‘I believe in Jesus.’”³²

Orthodox theology could not answer this question properly because it had no proper principle of hermeneutic. Having no proper principle of hermeneutic, orthodoxy misinterpreted the historical Jesus. For orthodoxy faith was “a formal thing (a mere ‘organ’ only a means to an end) which receives its content and its closer definition from the particular object of the moment.” On this basis it was impossible to make for faith “the stupendous claim that it alone justifies.”³³

³² Gerhard Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press. 1963), pp. 201–202.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

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1. Justification by Faith

If we are to see that faith and Jesus belong together we need a new principle of understanding. We need a principle of hermeneutics which shows us clearly “that the question of who Jesus is and what faith is cannot be answered apart from each other, but only in conjunction with each other.”³⁴

Only by “concentrating Christological thinking on the most rudimentary of all rudiments—viz., on the understanding of, the statement, ‘I believe in Jesus—we bind it at one and the same time to both the points from which it must not on any account be loosed if it is not to abandon the theme of Christology: to the historical Jesus and to our own reality. For faith is manifestly not Christian faith if it does not have a basis in the historical Jesus himself. And it is likewise not Christian faith if it is not we ourselves who in faith, are concerned with Jesus. Here, too, there is a correspondence: it is only along with each other that the real humanity of Jesus and our real humanity can come to expression in Christology.”³⁵

We see therefore that Jesus must not be the object but rather the “source and ground of faith.”³⁶ The synoptic Jesus “never links the concept of faith with his own person.” Jesus “does not speak of a faith in himself.”³⁷ Jesus “has part in that faith” of which he speaks. The “decisive gift of Jesus is the faith which

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

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makes existence sure, i.e., which points to its ground and so grounds it.”³⁸ Faith concerns “the whole of existence.” It gives our whole existence “aim, definition and ground.”³⁹ For us faith is therefore “existence in certainty.” By faith we have “ground under us although we step into the bottomless abyss.”⁴⁰ Faith “which makes existence a concentrated whole is essentially a faith that relates to the future ...” Faith “is power, indeed it is really participation in the omnipotence of God.”⁴¹ Faith is, therefore, “participation in the essence of God. We fail to see what faith is all about if we do not perceive the dimension to which this daring way of putting it points.”⁴² Only thus can we speak of “saving faith.”⁴³ “Faith confesses that God is the future and so it does not shun death. It does not shun temptation. If you believe, you do not run away.”⁴⁴

2. Participation in the Essence of God

Naturally if faith is participation in the essence of God and if Jesus’ faith points us to God then we must learn about God. At the same time we must speak of man. God and man “are not two themes but one.” To separate God and man misunderstands both. God and man are only known in relation to each other. There can only be knowledge of God if

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 242.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

⁴⁴ Gerhard Ebeling, *The Nature of Faith*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 181.

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thereby man reaches knowledge of himself. And man can only have self-knowledge if by it God is known. True knowledge of God is not of God in himself. True knowledge of God is of God who is for us and with us. And similarly, true knowledge of man is not of man in himself, in abstract isolation. In the last analysis man is abstract, isolated from the reality which concerns him, when he is not seen in his relation to God.”⁴⁵

3. God Experienced as a Question

Now “God is experienced as a question. In the context of the reality that encounters me. God encounters me as the questionableness of that encountering reality. What the word ‘God’ means can in the first instance according to its structure be described only as a question. The questionableness which encounters us along with the encountering reality provides, however vaguely, the reason why it can be claimed that what is said of God concerns every man and therefore can also in principle be intelligible to every man—viz. because it relates to something that has to do with the reality which encounters him.”⁴⁶

Ebeling again makes sure, as he did in his discussion of Jesus, that his view be not confused with either the traditional Roman Catholic view of natural theology or with the traditional Protestant view of the direct revelation of God within the world of nature and history and within the self-consciousness of man. We must go back of these

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁴⁶ Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, p. 347.

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views, argues Ebeling, to the person to which any revelation of God is addressed. This the traditional views of a natural knowledge of God does not do.

These traditional views of the knowledge of God did not realize that if God and man are not to be taken as abstractions but rather as from the outset being in correspondence with one another then they must be in terms of a common questionableness inherent in the reality that encounters us. This questionableness must be a “questionableness to which reality itself does not contain the answer. It cannot be answered by some element which is admittedly not yet known, but is to be discovered after all in the end, in the reality itself that concerns me. Rather, this questionableness—and that is part of its radicality—seeks to be answered by me myself, in fact through me, myself. For it is a case of my own questionableness.” The “radicality of the questionableness comes only when I become questionable in my own eyes, when the questionableness of the reality that concerns me and my own questionableness are thus identical.”⁴⁷

4. The Radical Questionableness of Reality

Thus “the task of a comprehensive analysis of reality” is “to observe the radical questionableness of reality.” Only by putting the matter in this manner do we put the matter of knowing God in a genuinely personal way. Only thus do we think of a God who is truly personal and meets us in person to person

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 348.



confrontation. Only thus can we think of God as truly transcendent. Only thus can we see that “the true quest for God is possible only for the man who has found him.”⁴⁸

5. God is Found in the Conscience

Where then do we find God? In our conscience. It is there where the radical questionableness of our being strikes us. Of course, we must not think of conscience as delivering “definite material teachings and instructions.” We must rather think of conscience as “man himself under the aspect of his involvement in radical questionableness.”⁴⁹

6. Faith as a Vision of Totality

It is thus when theology clarifies its concept of faith and undertakes its “ontological” task that we obtain a vision of “reality in its totality.” “The result will then be a concept of reality which takes its bearings not on objectification but on historic, not on the availability of reality but on its linguisticity, not on the existing present but on the future that is still to come. An ontology of this kind will certainly be nourished by theological insights and intended for theological use, yet it will be no theological ontology but a fundamental ontology open to general discussion, and one in which the derivative modes of reality, such as natural science’s concept of reality, will also have their place.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 349.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

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7. The Failure of “Objectivity”

For Ebeling it is the task of the New Hermeneutic to combine in one internally consistent view every aspect of reality in terms of faith in the historical Jesus, as pointing to God. This can be done only because the idea of faith and the idea of the historical Jesus pointing to God have no material content. So long as one bit of objectification is allowed to make my contribution to the picture the exhaustive correlativity between man and God would be destroyed. Therewith Jesus would become a directly identifiable entity in the impersonal dimension of space and time. God would become a conceptually manipulable “being,” a being among beings, instead of being, and man himself would be enmeshed in causal relationships.

8. The Critical-Historical Method

For Ebeling the entire program of theology must be recast in terms of this new principle of hermeneutic. In the *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 1950, Ebeling sets forth his program for the reinterpretation of all reality in terms of the new hermeneutic.

Ebeling here writes on: The Significance of the Critical Historical Method for Church and Theology in Protestantism. The “relation to the basic structure of thought in the modern age is the decisive point for the understanding of the Christian faith.” It is through “the modern mind’s principles of thought”

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that men for the first time became “fully aware of the historic character of existence.”⁵¹

Only after men understand the basically historic nature of reality could they have the right principle of hermeneutic. On the other hand “the category of exposition embraces the historic character of the present actualization of the event of revelation.”⁵²

The widespread interest in the new hermeneutic is also evident from the fact that it is Ebeling who writes an article of many columns on “Hermeneutik” in the third edition of the encyclopedia, *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. In the previous edition of this work very little space was given to the subject. As in his other writings, so also in this article, Ebeling is extremely critical of the Roman Catholic view of the proper interpretation of the New Testament. Roman Catholic theologians had no proper vision of the historic nature of reality at all and naturally had no proper principle of hermeneutic. Unfortunately things did not radically change for the better with the Reformation. What Ebeling says on this subject in the encyclopedia article can be summed up in what he says in the programmatic essay just mentioned. “The Reformation upset this ontological interpretation (of Romanism), but did not in principle surrender it. It is true that in shifting the accent from the metaphysical categories to the personalistic redemptive-history categories it destroyed the scholastic system, but for all that it still allowed a metaphysical and meta-historical common sense

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 38.

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that remained within the framework of the traditional way of thinking.”⁵³

Men like J. A. Ernesti and J. S. Semler did valuable work for the understanding of Scripture. Even so the fact that the hermeneutical problem has “its radical depth” in the historicness (*Geschichtlichkeit*) of existence “had not yet come to (their) consciousness.”⁵⁴ Friedrich Schleiermacher was the first to develop a hermeneutic from an “analysis of understanding.”

In recent times it was Barth’s Romans that is controlled by the problem of hermeneutic. As for Bultmann his program of demythologizing and of existential interpretation is basically important since, basing his work on Heidegger’s philosophy, he has a deeper insight into the relation of hermeneutic to the historicness of existence than any theologian before him. Beyond Bultmann we may point to Bonhoeffer and especially to Fuchs as developing a principle of hermeneutic that is involved in the historicness of existence.

Herewith we conclude our brief presentation of the New Hermeneutic of Fuchs and Ebeling. In their work, Fuchs and Ebeling, as noted, seek to overcome the remnants of objectification that they find in both Barth and Bultmann. These remnants of objectification in Barth and in Bultmann can and must be removed by means of a relentlessly

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 30–31.

⁵⁴ Gerhard Ebeling, “Hermeneutik,” *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gefeenwart*(Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1957), 3:254–255.

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consistent application of the principle of correlativity between the “subject” and the “object” of faith. Barth and Bultmann did not have the courage of their conviction on this point. They feared that a consistent application of the principle of correlativity between the “subject” and the “object” of faith would destroy faith altogether. How can there be anything to believe in if the “object” of faith has no nature of its own, independent of its own, independent of its relation to the “subject” of faith.

9. The Correlativity of the “Subject” and the “Object” of Faith

However, true “objectivity” of faith, both Fuchs and Ebeling argue, lies precisely in its correlativity to the believer. Short of the complete correlativity of the “object” and the “subject” of faith they would both operate in complete isolation. All the evils connected with the idea of a God in himself and a man in himself connected mechanically with each other in the way of the Chalcedon creed, would return unless we postulate exhaustive correlativity between God and man through Christ as the principle of historicity by which they are in native union with one another.

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Chapter 2:

Reaction of Some Modern Theologians

We inquire now as to the reaction to this attempt on the part of Fuchs and Ebeling to go beyond Barth and Bultmann by means of a more consistent correlativization of the object and the subject of faith.

Part 2 of the symposium on the New Hermeneutic, already referred to, deals with the American Discussion of the subject. In this part John Dillenberger, Robert W. Funk and Amos Wilder express their evaluation of the new hermeneutic of Fuchs and Ebeling.

I shall deal only with Dillenberger. He was, according to Fuchs, “our most important discussion partner.”¹

¹ D. Ernst Fuchs, “Response to the American Discussion,” in *New Frontiers in Theology*, Volume 2, *The New Hermeneutic*, ed. James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 2:235.

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A. John Dillenberger

1. On Broadening the New Hermeneutic

Dillenberger wants to broaden out the principles of the New Hermeneutic. For Fuchs and Ebeling, Dillenberger says, “theological hermeneutic is—identical with the word events, the happening of faith.” For these men “the total theological enterprise is the clarification of faith, that is, of true existence.”² Such being the case a new Christology is required. As over against the Chalcedonian position, Ebeling “insists that Christological statements can refer only to the human person of Jesus as the man of faith. The essential and only Christological statement is ‘I believe in Jesus’ in which ‘I believe’ and ‘Jesus’ and ‘faith’ are identical statements. This is because Jesus is the instance of faith, the author and perfecter of faith. Indeed when this word is pressed, it is clear that faith, Jesus, God, true existential reality, are interchangeable terms meaning the same reality.”³

At this point Dillenberger makes a basic criticism of the existential theology underlying the new hermeneutic. “Having overcome the objective language of world and world picture, have not the existentialist theologians developed a kind of objective and objectifying language of the self, a

² John Dillenberger, “On Broadening the New Hermeneutic” in *New Frontiers in Theology*, 2:148.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

language equally abstract? They have not only redefined the nature of language; they have reduced its avenues of direct applicability to the human. As a result, the contours of faith have little color and pulse.”⁴

2. On Going Beyond the New Hermeneutic

There is, argues, Dillenberger, real advance over Bultmann in the position of the new hermeneutic. But we must go beyond it with a newer hermeneutic of our own. We must broaden and therewith go beyond the approach of Fuchs and Ebeling.

“Let us say that the task of hermeneutic is to help bring to understanding. The language event serves precisely this function, for through it reality and life are conjoined.”⁵ So far so good. But has the New Hermeneutic really grasped the full breadth of the hermeneutical problem? The hermeneutical problem deals with the relation of language expression in past cultural periods and language expression in our own time. Thus the “intentionality of a theological statement” in our cultural era “may have to be delineated through expressions that outwardly contradict the original formulation. For example, the trinitarian formulation originally defended monotheism against the polytheism of the Greco-Roman world, in which creation and redemption were split between two gods and the redeemer god was known by gnosis rather than by

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

revelation. At a later juncture in history the same monotheistic intentionality—and this expression is deliberately used since monotheism is not a numerical problem—was affirmed through the unitarian protests against trinitarian polytheisms.”⁶

Why argue against trinitarianism and why argue against predestination? “The acceptance of theological statements as absolute truth and the rejection of theological statements as allegedly irrelevant and untrue reveal an identical mentality. The task of theological hermeneutic is to penetrate to the theological intention in all the theological statements, whether the statements are affirmed or rejected. The issue is wider than acceptance or rejection or even than truth or untruth; the issue is one of adequacy to express what is known in and through the word.”⁷

The people of the New Hermeneutic do not seem to see clearly that “intentionality and essence are not identical.” The problem of the interpretation of theological documents, as of the New Testament, is “not that of the kernel and the husks.”⁸ That is how the “liberal Protestant” thought of it. Luther and Calvin knew better.

“While they accepted a literal accuracy for Scripture, it was not a theological axiom.”⁹ We can “speak only analogically concerning God and man.”¹⁰ Final theological statements “are

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

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excluded.”¹¹ Only if we realize this fact do we appreciate the “full scope of the distortion in the traditional views.” “The traditional conception of the omnipotence and omniscience (of God) are among the clearest illustrations of the way in which man has made God in his own image, in the image of his sinful self.”¹² “The hermeneutical problem in all its forms we have encountered is illustrated in the problem of creation, also of little concern to the existentialists.” God took a risk in creating man. Man might conceivably want to “live unto himself.” But the “risk of creation was covered in the heart of God himself. It is in this sense that we can meaningfully talk about the Christological foundation of creation, the notion that all the possibilities are covered in the ground of creation itself.”¹³

3. The Supra-Lapsarian Instinct

If we thus regard the course of history in accordance with a “supralapsarian instinct” then we have a more comprehensive principle of unity than is found in the existentialist philosophy underlying the New Hermeneutic. At the same time we can then do better justice to the revelational uniqueness of each cultural epoch of history. Then too we can all the better see the full scope of the distortion of orthodox objectivism. We can then see more clearly than is possible in terms of existentialism “that there is no such thing as a final analysis of existence.”¹⁴ We can then see that “the absolute truth of God is

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 159–160.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

always known to us concretely and appropriately in the forms of the world in which we live.”¹⁵ “The truth of God encounters us in the concreteness of our historic situation.” We experience the redemption of God quite otherwise than our fathers did because we conceive of our need for redemption otherwise than they did.¹⁶

It is in this fashion that Dillenberger first expresses his basic agreement with and then his desire to go beyond the new hermeneutic. The only way he can go beyond the new hermeneutic is by stretching its principle of continuity and thus making it more formal, i.e., by removing from it what he thinks of as remnants of objectivism. By formalizing the new hermeneutical principle of continuity Dillenberger hopes to make two improvements.

4. Dillenberger’s “Improvements”

In the first place he thinks he has a better, even an absolutely irrefutable justification for excluding the idea that any such thing as a final interpretation of history is to be found in history. As noted he feels fully justified in saying that “the traditional conceptions of omnipotence and omniscience are among the clearest illustrations of the way in which man has made God in his image, in the image of his sinful self.”¹⁷

In the second place Dillenberger agrees with the approach of the New Hermeneutic in saying that

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

every cultural epoch “does express the truth of God” even the “absolute truth of God” namely that God is love. Fuchs and Ebeling have informed us that God is love and love is God. They were able to do this, as they thought, first, negatively, by excluding all “objectification” of revelation, and second, positively, by morally postulating that of which intellectually they could have no awareness. Dillenberger seeks to go further than Fuchs and Ebeling by making, if possible, a more absolute antithesis between man’s “cognitive” and his “moral” relation to God. It is this that enables him, he thinks, on the one hand to do better justice to the idea of openness to the future and, on the other hand, to the absolute *a priori* impossibility of discovering any direct revelation of God in history.

5. Back to the Parmenidean-Heraclitean Dilemma

In all this Dillenberger involuntarily suggests to us the only way any one, working on the same Kantian principles of epistemology and ontology as those on which Fuchs and Ebeling work, can seek to go “beyond” them. If you desire to go beyond Fuchs and Ebeling then you must first, with them, go beyond Bultmann as Bultmann goes beyond Heidegger. Then, secondly, you must with Heidegger, first go beyond Kant and, with Kant, go beyond the Parmenidean-Heraclitean contrast of Greek philosophy. But how can one go beyond the Parmenidean-Heraclitean antithesis? Parmenides said that all things are one and that to be one this one must be static. Heraclitus said that all things are

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one and, to be one, this one must be one flux. Parmenides said that a proper, i.e., universal principle of unity must exclude all change. Heraclitus said that a proper, i.e., universal principle of unity must exclude all changelessness.

On Parmenides' view man must find unity or coherence in his individual experience by having this experience absorbed into and therefore lost in eternal being. On Heraclitus' view man must find coherence in his experience by having this experience absorbed into and lost in pure flux. On Parmenides' view man must find differentiation in experience by being absorbed into and therefore lost in pure being. On Heraclitus' view man must find differentiation in experience by being absorbed into and therefore lost in pure becoming.

To be victorious over Heraclitus, Parmenides had to destroy himself. He had to prove to Heraclitus that neither one of them could have any experience of history as differentiation-in-identity until both would be lost in pure becoming. In other words if Parmenides as an historical person was to prove anything to Heraclitus as a historical person, history had to be reduced to eschatology. Only at the end of history, not as *Endgeschichte* but as *Schlussgeschichte* could Parmenides boast of his victory over Heraclitus.

But then, by the same token, Heraclitus could at the same time boast of his victory over Parmenides. History without newness, without openness to the absolutely contingent future, is as meaningless as history without rationality.

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However, on the view of either Parmenides or Heraclitus, no future day would in any wise be distinguishable from any previous day. The passage of time would have no significance for either of them. The passage of time would have to be a cross between an already complete eternity and a never to begin beginning.

There would be no human being, aware of himself at a certain time of history to be concerned about another human being aware of himself at the same or at another time in history. If there were any such thing as self-awareness, it would be self-awareness eternally self-aware of itself independently of time—while yet springing into self-awareness at the first moment of time.

Heidegger appeals to the early Greek metaphysical philosophers as a background for his supposedly non-metaphysical philosophy. He is right in doing so. The difference between early Greek philosophy and post-Kantian anti-metaphysical philosophy is merely one of emphasis. Both positions hold to the idea of the utter questionableness of man and to the idea of all being as correlative to the idea of the plenary ability of man to penetrate to the bottom of all being. Heidegger, the post-Kantian anti-metaphysical par excellence thinker is *a priori* certain that he knows the nature of reality so well that, with Parmenides, he can say that the creator-creature distinction of biblical teaching is utterly unintelligible. At the same time Heidegger asserts also that no man can know anything about ultimate reality.

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6. The Modern Idea of *Wesensschau*

For Heidegger it is all a matter of vision, of *Wesensschau*, a state of being of which the poets speak best. But then these poets must be the proper kind of poets. They must speak of the lighting up of such a being in which being and non-being, time and eternity, past and future are all involved in one another. They must speak of a general being that enlightens all individual human beings by telling them aloud in utter silence that they participate in that of which it can determinatively be said that nothing determinate can be said about

Dillenberger says that man can only speak analogically of God. But the analogical speaking of which Dillenberger speaks is the speaking of indeterminate Being to indeterminate beings. When Dillenberger seeks to widen the problematics of the New Hermeneutic and therewith to beyond it, he can do this only by making its principle of unity more formal than it was and, correlative to this, by making its principle of diversity more purely contingent than it was. And this he could do only if he could make the man who initiates the process of interpretation more completely autonomous than he is in the thinking of Fuchs and Ebeling. This he cannot do. Taking a *Schritt Zuruck* all the way back through the later and the earlier Heidegger to Kant and then to the early Greeks would be identical with taking a step forward toward openness to the future. Dillenberger's "supra-lapsarian instinct" leads him back to the vague, impersonal teleology of being inherent in Aristotle's idea of the analogy of being. It took the genius of St. Thomas to "integrate" this

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pagan teleology with the teleology of history found in Scripture. On the basis of this pagan teleology, the church was said to be the continuation of the incarnation and the supper of the Lord lost its ethical significance and was reduced to a metaphysical continuation of the once-for-all sacrifice on the cross of Christ. It took the genius of Luther and of Calvin to set the teleology of Scripture free from the teleology of Aristotle.

Liberal Protestantism claimed to carry on the heritage of the Reformation. In reality it, too, as well as Romanism, reduced Christianity to a vague teleology similar to the teleology of Aristotle. Neo-orthodoxy has wrought no change in this. Its teleology is not basically different from that of Aristotle. Since Vatican 2 it has become clear that neo-orthodox Protestantism, based largely on Kant's primacy of the ethical or aesthetic reason, and Aristotle's teleology are alike based on the assumption that man can and must come to an understanding of himself by means of such categories of being and of non-being as he can devise for himself. It is this approach that comes to renewed expression in the new hermeneutics. Dillenberger seeks in vain to broaden and go beyond this new hermeneutic. It already takes into its purview heaven and earth and all that is under the earth or above the heavens. Man's autonomy is assumed to be the sole presupposition in terms of which any revelation that might come from any god would be intelligible. Yet it is this very supposition of the autonomous self-understanding of man that acts as the primary representation of what Paul speaks of when he says that "knowing God" men have not

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kept him in remembrance (Rom 1:21). Calvin clearly urges Paul's view upon us. Man has no pre-understanding of himself apart from and prior to his confrontation with the revelation of God in Christ. It is from this Calvinistic point of view that we shall finally need to evaluate the new hermeneutic as well as every other form of modern theology, philosophy and science.

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B. Fritz Buri

At this point we give brief consideration to two theologians who deal with the problems of the new hermeneutic in a somewhat different terminology. We refer to Fritz Buri and Schubert M. Ogden. These men as well as Fuchs and Ebeling, want to go beyond Barth and Brunner. Both of them want to do this by giving a broad philosophical basis to the gospel of Christ. Only thus they are convinced, can the gospel be effectively proclaimed to and understood by modern man. Fritz Buri does not deal so much with Fuchs and Ebeling as with Bultmann and Barth. But he answers the same questions that Fuchs and Ebeling ask. This gives us a valuable indirect insight into the thinking of these men.

Buri states his position clearly and succinctly in his book *Christian Faith in Our Time* (*Christliche Glaube in Dieser Zeit.*)

1. The Face of Our Time

In the first section of his book Buri discusses *The Face of Our Time*.

We must, he says, understand the “temper of our age, and especially—those novel features of our

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own visage, which can be contrasted with that of the preceding era.”¹⁸

In the era preceding ours there was “an unprecedented confidence in science in response to the question, what can I know.” This era preceding ours was, secondly, marked by “a positive relationship to the person of Jesus as answer to the question, What ought I to do?” Finally, the era preceding ours was marked by “the application of biblical conception to ‘faith in progress’ in response to the question, What may I hope?”¹⁹

Our own era may be contrasted with the previous one on all three of these points. We all recognize today “that scientific knowledge, too, has its boundaries.”²⁰ The very distinction that many of us make today between *Historie* and *Geschichte* is based on this recognition of the limitation of scientific knowledge. “Relativity and the quantum theory have undermined the absolute certainty of physical law as well as the deterministic view of causality.”²¹ “It is no longer likely that science will develop an absolutely valid world view which theology would have to challenge.”²² On the contrary “natural science is actually on the way to religion.”²³

¹⁸ Fritz Buri, *Christian Faith in Our Time*, trans. Edward Allen Kent (New York: Macmillan Co., 1966), pp. 19–20.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 22, 24.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

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In the second place “to the loss of faith in science there corresponds a fundamental modification of our view of the personality of Jesus.” We now realize that we cannot “achieve a direct relation” to Jesus’ “timeless vision.”²⁴ “On re-evaluation the real Jesus turns out to have been a powerful historical personality, but a personality who lived and acted in an intellectual environment almost entirely foreign and incomprehensible to modern man.” “Jesus believed himself appointed by God to the role of future Messiah, coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory! Only in this mythological context can the words and deeds of Jesus be explained adequately.”²⁵

Now, even though science “is actually on the way to religion” this religion cannot be a religion in which “this radically foreign eschatological Jesus” is the center. The primitive *Weltanschauung* of this Jesus was “shared by only a few obscure religious sects.”²⁶ The “absolutely foreign conceptual climate of the eschatological,” we now see clearly, is radically different from ours.²⁷ We can get no answer to the question “What ought I to do?” from such a Jesus.

In the third place, as there has been a “crisis in science” and a modification “of our view of the personality,” so there has been a “collapse of modern ‘faith in progress’ in the cultural crisis of our time.” Oswald Spengler’s book *The Decline of the*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 32.



West has become a byword of our time.”²⁸ Our time “has now taken on an apocalyptic cast.” Many people are today “again reading the Bible ‘with that familiar sense of the eschatological.’ ”²⁹

We must, says Buri, find the proper reaction to the present situation.

2. Is There Room for Faith Today?

Look for a moment at science. Shall we be happy about the limitations it imposes on itself? Science no longer speaks against the idea of God. But does this mean that it speaks for God? Does it not rather mean that it does not speak about God at all? Can we speak “at all today about God?” At any rate can any one speak intelligibly to any one else about God? Can any one be “in any position to offer a convincing account of his own faith, let alone that of others?”³⁰ This is the problem the new hermeneutic considers.

Atheism, therefore, appears to many to be involved in modern man’s cultural consciousness. But then “at the other extreme” there are those who proclaim an idea of “redemptive history” in purely irrational fashion. But “neither naturalism nor the theology of redemptive history has been able to give positive meaning to history.” Naturalism “surrenders history to nature and consequently denies its very substance; the latter interprets history as the domain of the devil and consoles itself with

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 34.



an illusory 'miraculous story.' How very far each has progressed from what Jesus intended with his tidings of the kingdom of God; 'Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' (Mt 4:14)."³¹

We must, accordingly, ask anew how we can speak of God, what Christ means to us, and what is the meaning of history and of the kingdom of God. We must give better answers than that which either naturalism or a "theology of redemptive history" can give.

As we ask these questions anew we must realize "the face of our time is also our face" and that "ours must be a faith appropriate to our era.... It is our face that must be remade by faith, our face that must be stamped afresh with a new inner being." As we begin our search for new answers let us be deeply aware that we "can know nothing apart from our limited historical context."³²

It is on this raft of the "historic context" that Buri ventures out in order to discover what I may know, what I ought to do, and what I may hope. He answers all three questions at once by a rhetorical question of his own. Says Buri: "What, we must ask, has happened to the notion of a creator God, the actuality of a redemption Christ, the realization of the kingdom of God?"³³

3. Can We Speak of God?

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 47.



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a. “How are we to speak of God?” This is our first question. Let us be modest in answering. Let us give the atheist his due. We cannot speak “adequately of God, even on the basis of the renewed significance of the Christ ...”³⁴

This being the case let us, none the less, make a beginning. We note that the atheist “depends upon the reality that he denies.”³⁵ Moreover the atheist is fully justified in rejecting any “claim to absolute validity that theology” often “attaches to its own views ...”³⁶

One may always “perceive in his statements the will for unconditional honesty and thus implicitly an ultimate respect for silence regarding the inexpressible.”³⁷

Secondly, let us also give revelation theology its due. We cannot agree with revelation theology when it reduces revelation to mythology. Even so we need a measure of mythology. How otherwise could we appeal to the idea of the creation account of Scripture. Or how else could we appeal to the Bible’s idea of eschatology? Revelation “has preserved for us the very real world of biblical symbolism.”³⁸

We must, as it were, demythologize both atheism and revelation theology. The error of both, argues Buri in effect, is in the fact that for all their opposition to the traditional view of directly present

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 48–49.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

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ascertainable revelation of a self-sufficient God in nature, in history and in man, they still “absolutize things which cannot be absolutized.” Atheism absolutizes reason and revelation theology absolutizes “faith at the expense of reason.”³⁹

By its absolutization of reason, atheism “delivers itself into the camp of the superstitious ...”⁴⁰ Buri appeals to Karl Jasper’s at this point, over against the essentially Parmenidean notion that being is and must be what reason, thinking logically, says it must be. This is what is meant, with the idea that thought is adequate to being. In his view of the Incomprehensible, the all-Encompassing, Jaspers is seeking to carry forth to its conclusion Kant’s notion of the ultimacy of purely contingent being.

In following Jaspers and with Jaspers following Kant, Buri is not intending to return to the historic Protestant view that man is a creature made in the image of God. Historic Protestant theology holds that as the creature of God man’s thinking presupposes the direct revelation of God in history. On this view the Parmenidean notion of the adequacy of thought is evidence of the apostate nature of the creature’s attitude toward his creator. However, the modern notion of pure contingency and irrationalism is in this respect no more acceptable than that of Parmenides. In both cases the biblical distinction between God as man’s Creator and man as God’s creature is erased. Buri appeals to his idea of creation as a basis on which he may stand as he seeks to answer Kant’s three

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

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questions. However, his starting point is not that of creation at all. Like Plato he starts with man's capacities not as created but as ultimate. He starts with human autonomy, and for all his attempt to limit reason by means of the recognition of Jaspers' notion of the all-encompassing, incomprehensible ultimate, he is as rationalistic and as deterministic as was Parmenides. The reach of his reason is as wide as that of Parmenides. Buri "knows" as well as Kant "knows" what man's ultimate environment cannot be. In purely *a priori* fashion Buri assumes that God cannot be the creator of man in the biblical sense of the term. Creation in the Reformation sense of the term has to be demythologized. If taken as *Historie* the creation idea is completely unacceptable to Buri. Only if it is demythologized is creation the proper basis for science, for philosophy and for religion.

4. Deeper de-Objectification

Without realizing this point we cannot understand how Buri, as well as Dillenberger, intends to broaden and then go beyond the new hermeneutic. If we are to broaden the new hermeneutic, Buri contends, we must first agree with its program of demythologizing. If we are to go beyond Fuchs and Ebeling then we must de-objectify God's revelation to man more ruthlessly than they did. We must have no God and no Christ who can, at any point, be said to give "objective" evidence of their presence.

Keeping this in mind enables us to understand the nature of Buri's criticism on revelation-theology. By revelation-theology Buri does not refer to any such theology as the Reformers held. He refers primarily

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to the theology of Karl Barth. He agrees with Barth so far as he has reduced the “objective” theology of the Reformers to that of projection theology. Buri’s criticism is to the effect that Barth has not demythologized Reformation theology with sufficient thoroughness. According to Barth, says Buri, “the absolute chasm between God’s word and man’s word can be spanned only at one point, namely in Jesus Christ.”⁴¹ But this is one point too many. Barth, after all, absolutizes the presence of Christ in history. He does not allow for the fact that reason has the responsibility of evaluating the revelation of God in Christ in history. Some theologians “talk as if they were lecturing to us from heaven on high ...”⁴²

5. Kant’s Three Questions

Therefore, if we are to answer Kant’s three questions, especially the first one, What we may know? we must appeal to “believing reason” (*galubige Vernunft*).⁴³

By means of believing reason we “can accede to a new and truly tenable understanding of the biblical conception of creation, to an accessible and truly acceptable faith in God, the creator.”⁴⁴

By using believing reason we can follow Adam’s example when he started off all human knowledge by naming. A truly scientific procedure follows

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*



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Adam's example. "All science depends on naming, the process of definition. With the assistance of a body of concepts we can understand and speak with one another, comprehend ourselves and one another."⁴⁵ Of course, "the realm of concepts through which we communicate with each other is not the world as it exists independently of us—in itself as philosophy would say. It is rather a second world of our own creation, the created world of mental objects."⁴⁶ Accordingly "our thoughts must always be re-established in the experience in the experience from which their content derives. Reason, in the process of defining and drawing conclusions, must relate itself closely to reality. It must not become free-floating speculation."⁴⁷

Buri's believing reason "has a difficult task to perform. It must construct a world of thought that is internally coherent and all comprehensive. But to be thus internally coherent and all comprehensive this world of thought must be purely *a priori*. It must not in any sense and at any point relate to reality. For reality is purely contingent; it does not allow itself to be categorized at all.

Applied to the problem of man's knowledge of God, Buri expresses his difficulty by saying: "What we fix in thought is, and remains our product—and on this process we construct a religion directly opposed to that intended by God. If we persist in

⁴⁵ p. 63.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

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speaking to God in such limited terms, we are only workers in an 'idol factory.' ”⁴⁸

6. Back to the Parmenidean-Heraclitean Dilemma

On the other hand on Buri's view man must, with Parmenides, know, and in order to know, control all existence. To know anything one must be able to say, with Spinoza, that the order and connection of ideas is identical with the order and connection of things. On Buri's view one must at one and the same time be an utter irrationalist and an utter rationalist.

The solution that Buri offers to the problem is that pure rationalism and pure irrationalism are correlative to one another. With Heidegger, Buri starts with the famous question why there should be something rather than nothing. This question expresses the idea of purely contingent nature of reality. Says Buri: "This question radically challenges all our familiar concepts and terms, which are dissipated in the face of an unfathomable nothingness ..."⁴⁹

Soon we shall see how Buri metamorphoses this "unfathomable nothingness" into God as the Father of mankind. For the moment we note that his complete contingency and his complete irrationalism are made correlative to his equally complete determinism and rationalism. Buri

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 66–67.

expresses his determinism and rationalism by means of his doctrine of creation. In it lies his principle of continuity. But then, to be a proper principle of continuity the doctrine of creation must not be taken “mythologically,” in the way traditional Protestantism takes it. The traditional doctrine of creation must be demythologized and then interpreted existentially in order to serve as a proper principle of unity for modern man. That is to say the doctrine of creation can serve as a proper principle of continuity for the reason of modern man only if it is taken as correlative to the idea of contingency as his principle of discontinuity. Man cannot express, let alone give any meaning to the absolutely questionableness of all existence, that of God as well as that of man, unless one does so because man, as well as God, has the absolute answer within himself. Man’s self-understanding requires, as it presupposes, the complete correlativity of a metaphysical determinism to a metaphysical indeterminism and therefore an epistemological rationalism and an epistemological irrationalism.

Buri’s believing reason presupposes as it produces a new metaphysic and new epistemology. It is all summed up in the following words: “Reason must recognize both the limits and possibilities by its own createdness, i.e., it must recognize itself as a never-ending, objectifying process of knowing which in each moment is nevertheless capable of advancing toward the creative mystery of reality.”⁵⁰

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

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Buri obviously thinks he is offering a new metaphysic and a new epistemology. By means of his new approach to the interpretation of reality based on a new concept of creation he offers a new hermeneutic, a hermeneutic that is calculated to overcome the defects of the hermeneutic of Karl Barth. The basic question of a modern hermeneutic is how to relate the saving work of God in Christ of which the New Testament speaks to modern man's self understanding. Barth's hermeneutic was, thinks Buri, too one-sidedly Christological. Barth did not do justice to the legitimate claims of reason, as this is based upon the doctrine of creation. As a consequence one can, in Barth's theology "never say for certain," where God's word ends and human words begin. "And therein lies the danger that God's Word will be degraded into human word, that human words will be given out as God's Word."⁵¹ It is no wonder that a revelation theology such as that of Barth can give itself no proper account of the relation of faith to reason and that it cannot clearly show how "the Word of God can be preached to unbelieving man so that it will be acceptable to him."⁵²

It is only by means of believing reason that we can "speak rationally of God but in a sense appropriate to the biblical conception of creation."⁵³

Moreover, speaking properly about God implies that we can also speak properly about Jesus as the Christ. Buri undertakes to show us the connection

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

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between these two. He asks “What Does Christ Mean For Us?”

7. Buri’s New Christ

To begin with we must first thoroughly demythologize the orthodox view of the incarnation as we have thoroughly demythologized the orthodox view of creation. Buri no doubt knows that Barth has “actualized” the incarnation. Barth “actualized” the incarnation in order to rid theology of the “orthodox” ideas of a God in himself and a man in himself Barth’s God is what he is to man in Christ and Christ is what he is in his work of saving mankind. In actualizing the orthodox doctrine of incarnation, Barth, at the same time, universalized the orthodox doctrine of atonement. Barth actualized the orthodox doctrine of incarnation and universalized the orthodox doctrine of atonement in the interest of his sovereign universal grace. On the one hand Barth’s idea of the sovereignty of God’s grace, and with it of the freedom of man, expresses his basically contingent view of the nature of reality. Barth, says G. C. Berkouwer, is more nominalistic than was Plato. On the other hand, Barth’s idea of the universality of God’s grace and with it of the rationality of man is based upon his basically determinist view of reality. Barth is, in addition to what Berkouwer said, more of a realist than was Plato.

The significant point of Barth’s Christology and of his doctrine of the atonement, we recall, is that pure contingency and pure determinism, pure nominalism and pure realism, are taken as

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correlative to one another. Moreover, these are taken as correlative to one another because of the fact that together they constitute a projection of the would-be autonomous man. By means of the complete correlativization of purely determinist principle of continuity and a purely indeterminist principle of discontinuity Barth constructs a Christ in whom God, the wholly other God, is wholly revealed to man and when wholly revealed is in this absolutely clear revelation still wholly hidden.

It is by means of the idea that God is wholly revealed and, at the same time wholly hidden, that Barth constructs a theology that is wholly in accord with the principles of modern science and philosophy. What science needs, we are told, is a view of reality in which the idea of exhaustive determinism and absolute determinism are taken as correlative to one another. Science needs the idea of a system in which all reality has from all eternity already been interpreted. The conceptualizing activity involved in scientific procedure can be satisfied with nothing less than that. Science also needs the idea of the absolute openness of reality. The idea of discovering new factual material can be satisfied with nothing less than that. But science needs these two as correlative to one another. Only if these two are taken as correlative to one another can man be sure that he has true self-understanding and therefore a proper understanding of nature and of history, of the relation of the past to the future. Only thus can one properly, because exhaustively, demythologize orthodox notions, such as that of an all-controlling providence of God.

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Moreover, Barth's view of the wholly revealed and wholly hidden character of God's revelation to man is also in accord with the principles of modern philosophy. Barth claims to be indifferent to the claims of science and repudiates the idea of this theology as resting in any wise upon existential philosophy. But Barth's theology as well as that of Bultmann is in accord with the basic approach to the nature of reality found in an existential philosophy such as that of Heidegger. We need not, with Heinrich Ott, distinguish between a later and an earlier Heidegger in order to establish a connection between his views and those of Barth. There is in both men an unlimited stress upon the wholly contingent character of reality. In both men we also find a principle of unity that is correlative to the notion of pure contingency. Barth merely seeks to go beyond existential philosophy. In this respect he resembles Bultmann.

But now Buri seeks to go beyond Barth. How will he accomplish this? Can he inwardize the human self more absolutely than Barth has done? Can he, having inwardized and therefore absolutized the human self more relentlessly than Barth, also correlativize the principles of unity and diversity in human predication more absolutely than Barth did? Will he, perhaps, formalize the principle of unity more absolutely than Barth did, without at the same time absolutizing the principle of contingency more absolutely than Barth did.

With these questions in mind we examine what Buri says about Christ. First he seeks to demythologize the Chalcedon creed more

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thoroughly than Barth has done. But does he do this more thoroughly than Barth did with his actualizing of this creed? We shall see. Says, Buri: “First, the figure of Christ belongs fully to history with all its contingencies: no phenomenon apparent to man can escape the historical dimensions.” On this fact of contingency we must base “the admittedly problematic question of a historical Jesus ...” But the second statement like unto the first is that “despite the threat of historical relativism—the power embodied in the figure of Christ is manifest throughout history.”⁵⁴

In speaking of the “admittedly problematic question of a historical Jesus” Buri does not mean merely that critical research is supposedly confronted with all manner of alleged historical discrepancies in the gospels of the New Testament. He means something much more basic than that. It is for him primarily a question of *Geschichte* rather than *Historie*. It is not a question of surface factuality in the I-it dimension. It is a question of the impossibility of the existence of any such thing as an absolute revelation of a self-sufficient God in history. In short, for Buri to talk about a view of reality such as the Reformers had and to try to deal conceptually with such a reality is to work in an “idol-factory.”

Believing reason knows better than to attempt such a thing. Reality is purely contingent. Because of this fact man is open to the future. His creation in the image of God implies that he is in God and with God open to the future. In the incarnation God

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

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becomes really man. Man in himself has no future. In becoming man God in Christ too has no future. Both God and man are past. Both God and man are past in that both belong to the surface world of calendar relationships. Even so, God's entering with man into the past does not mean that he has lost his openness to the future. God cannot lose his openness to the future. And because God cannot lose his openness to the future, man, too, made in the image of God, as he is, cannot lose his openness to the future. For all the demythologization of every notion of any directly discernible revelation of God through Christ in history Buri insists that "the power embodied in the figure of Christ is manifest throughout history."⁵⁵ With Barth Buri agrees that this power is manifest in Jesus of Nazareth. But as he thinks against Barth, Buri holds that what is true of Christ is true of every man. Unless this be maintained, Buri argues, we fall into docetism. The "current orthodoxy" i.e., neo-orthodoxy, does not believe that the Christ fundamentally belongs to the human sphere."⁵⁶ And then, *mirabile dictu*, this current orthodoxy expects cosmic changes from its supra-historical Christ.

The cure for these left-overs of old orthodoxy in the new orthodoxy, of Barth, Buri argues in effect, lies in the absolute correlativization of the principle of pure contingency and formal rationality. Only by this means can we accomplish a complete demythologization of both the traditional doctrine of God the Father and of Christ the Son of God. Only by this means can we do justice to teachings of both

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

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the apostle John and the apostle Paul for whom “the Christ is hidden in the eternal: surely, they proclaim, he existed at the creation of the world.” “Thus the concept of Christ in the Bible is a symbol of a special creative intervention of God through which the first, incomplete creation and its powers are overturned and replaced by a new, perfected creation under God’s sovereign authority.”⁵⁷

It is thus that “the myth of Christ, in the form in which Jesus, and subsequently his followers, communicated it, can become a symbol of salvation in our own world; but the key to our understanding of the Christ lies ultimately in ourselves.”⁵⁸

When we realize that the understanding of the Christ lies ultimately in ourselves then we can demythologize the Scripture narratives without restriction and give an existential interpretation to them that is fully acceptable to modern man. Then we have answered Kant’s three questions. What can I know, what should I do and what may I hope. “Only through Christ” we now see “do we become aware of the creations’s longing for redemption” and do “we even recognize the eschatological crisis and the answering grace which promises our salvation—the grace that originates in creative mystery and which through the Christ is transformed into the love of the Father for his children.”⁵⁹

We now realize that the mystery of God is not “overcome” but rather made “more profound in our

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

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eyes.” How can the principle of pure metaphysical contingency and of utter irrationality be transformed for us into our heavenly Father through whose universally present Son who is the Spirit now give us grace and power as well as meaning? The answer is that God is now no longer merely “the ground of being” but “the meaning of our existence” as well.⁶⁰ “In the eschatological Christ, particularly as he was understood by Jesus and his apostle Paul, we find the symbol of the special possibilities inherent for man in the free gift of love between God and man. And in the kingdom of God we discover the domain in which the creation of God is realized as history in its true sense—history always pointing beyond itself.”⁶¹

In concluding our survey of Buri’s argument we take note of the following:

Buri does not directly relate his work to that of Fuchs and Ebeling but he deals with the same problem they discuss.

Their problem as well as his problem is how best to state the *kerygma* of the New Testament in language that modern man can understand. To discover an answer to this problem, both they and he agree that we must seek first to discover how modern man understands himself. Modern philosophy, in particular existentialist philosophy, has taught man how to understand himself.’ Modern philosophy since Kant, distinguishes between the I-it and the I-thou dimension of reality.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

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Man lives at the border-line of these dimensions. This is the dimension of pure freedom. In this dimension man meets his fellow man and his God. Here the past and the future of the I-it dimension are as though they were not: they are pointers to the all-encompassing present. Here the process of conceptualization of the I-it dimension is absorbed in faith-understanding. All the contradictory concepts of the I-it dimensions become interdependent with one another, as supplemental concepts and ideals. As members of the I-thou dimension together with Jesus Christ, we have faith that the non-being or nothing of philosophy is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in whom and through whom the kingdom of love and light is everywhere operative in the hearts of men and is bound to be victorious over all opposition to it at last.

Buri as well as Fuchs and Ebeling wants to show how it is in accordance with the best and latest philosophical epistemology to accept all this. Buri thinks that the “current orthodoxy” has not made this point sufficiently clear. To make this clear, argues Buri, we must have a hermeneutic that goes beyond this “current orthodoxy,” more particularly beyond the theology of Barth. Barth was mistaken in that he refused to base his theology upon a broad philosophical epistemology. Because of this fact Barth did not develop a hermeneutic that is adequate for our time. Barth was really unable to show modern man that for his understanding of himself, for his authentic self-existence, he needs the idea—the Christ of the New Testament as a pointer to the all-encompassing principle of love.

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Fuchs and Ebeling are also seeking to set the hermeneutical problem in an all-comprehensive philosophical context. They are more directly concerned with Bultmann than they are with Barth. But their effort of developing a hermeneutic that goes beyond Bultmann closely resembles the method of Buri as he seeks to go beyond Barth.

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C. Schubert M. Ogden

We look now at still another effort to develop a new method of presenting the *kerygma* to modern man. In his book, *Christ Without Myth*, Schubert M. Ogden tries to go beyond Bultmann as Buri seeks to go beyond Barth. This makes his work of special interest to us.

Ogden first sets forth Bultmann's general position on demythologizing and existential interpretation. Nothing needs now to be said on the first point. Ogden sets forth his understanding of Bultmann's total view. He sums it up by saying: "We have sought to show that the inner unity of Bultmann's thought lies in his contention that the criticism of the New Testament arising with necessity out of the situation of modern man is identical with a criticism sanctioned by the New Testament message itself; and that, in attempting to carry out such criticism, Bultmann has succeeded in presenting the main ingredients of a complete constructive theology."⁶²

Having said this Ogden goes on to show "the inconsistency of his (Bultmann's) proposed solution." There are many critics of Bultmann who hold that "his theology is structurally inconsistent."⁶³ We must look into the reason for this

⁶² Schubert M. Ogden, *Christ Without Myth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), p. 95.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 95, 96.

opinion. This will give our discussion a broad and up-to-date significance.

There are, in general, three types of views with respect to the value of Bultmann's demythologizing program.

(1) First, there is what we may call the central party. This party follows Bultmann closely. Among the men of this party is Hans Werner Bartsch, the editor of the series of works on *Kerygma und Mythos*.⁶⁴

(2) Secondly, there is the position of the "right." Among the men of this party is Karl Barth "and those who share his general point of view."⁶⁵

(3) Finally, there is the party of the "left." The most articulate spokesman for this position has been the Basel systematic theologian, Fritz Buri."⁶⁶

It is of interest to note, says Ogden, that "from both the 'right' and the 'left' responsible critics have argued that Bultmann's view is an uneasy synthesis of two different and ultimately incompatible standpoints."⁶⁷

What Ogden has said thus far makes us wonder whether he can offer a theology that is structurally stronger than that of Bultmann. Has he an hermeneutic that is, in any significant way, different from that of Bultmann? And how does his

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

restructuring of Bultmann's theology differ from that of Fuchs and Ebeling?

1. Ogden on Barth's Criticism of Bultmann

We can follow Ogden's argument rather easily up to a point. In the first place Ogden discusses Barth's attempt to understand Bultmann. Bultmann claims to interpret reality in terms of the primacy of the Christ-Event. This is fine, says Barth. But does he not, in actual practice, operate with the primacy of an existential philosophy? How can Bultmann do justice to the resurrection of Christ as the basis of faith? Does not Bultmann really hold to a parthenogenesis of faith? It is along such lines as these, argues Ogden, that Barth has criticized Bultmann. Describing Barth's attitude toward Bultmann Ogden says, "The only tenable alternative to Bultmann's position, then, is a theology that rejects or at least qualifies his proposed method in favor of a special biblical hermeneutic and by so doing, frees itself to justify its emphasis on the Christ-event by means of statements that (from Bultmann's point of view) are essentially mythological and unamenable to existential interpretation."⁶⁸

Ogden does not agree with Barth's criticism of Bultmann. Barth has not cleared himself thoroughly of the process of objectification. Barth is still looking for an "objective" foundation for his faith in the resurrection of Christ. Why does not Barth have the

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

courage of his conviction and really interpret the whole of the Christ-event in terms of *Geschichte* rather than fall back at critical points on the notion of *Historie*.

2. Ogden's Own Criticism of Bultmann

But if we cannot follow Barth neither can we follow Buri.⁶⁹ “Buri holds that Bultmann’s presentation of Christ in terms of his ‘existential significance’ involves a complete dehistoricization in which the New Testament’s statements concerning the cross and the resurrection are reduced to dispensable mythological expressions of authentic self-understanding.”⁷⁰

Yet Bultmann seeks “to preserve the ‘*kerygma* character’ of the New Testament proclamation by means of ‘the mythological saving event of Jesus Christ.’”⁷¹

According to Buri, says Ogden, “the only tenable alternative to Bultmann’s position—is to reject his appeal to a mythological saving-event as incompatible with modern man’s picture of himself and his world and, in so doing, to carry to its logical conclusion, to the point of ‘dekerygmatisation’, the program of demythologization he proposes.”⁷²

⁶⁹ Ogden discusses Buri’s article “*Entmythologisierung oder Entkerygmatisierung*” in *Kerygma und Mythos* ed. Hans Werner Bartsch (Hamburg: Herbert Reich. Evangelischer Verlag, 1952), 2:85–101.

⁷⁰ Ogden, *Christ Without Myth*, p. 108.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁷² *Ibid.*

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It appears that Barth and Buri, representing positions to the right and to the left of Bultmann, agree in saying that if Bultmann carried through his program of demythologization consistently he would reduce the *kerygma* to something inherently possible to the self-understanding of man.

This “consensus” of opinion in regard to Bultmann’s theology may be shown to be relevant for instance, from the way Bultmann “carries out his hermeneutical program.” According to Bultmann “life in faith” is “simply the moment-by-moment realization of man’s original possibility of authentic self-understanding.”⁷³

However much Bultmann may deny that philosophy and theology are identical and however much he may insist “on the independent existence of the event Jesus Christ, he nevertheless interprets this event in such a way that to believe in it is indistinguishable from an authentic understanding of one’s existence as a person.” For corroboration of this interpretation Ogden quotes Bultmann to the effect that “the possibility of the word’s being understood coincides with the possibility of man’s understanding himself.”⁷⁴

Any position short of this, is from Bultmann’s point of view, says Ogden, a falling back into mythology. It was precisely at this point that Barth failed. Barth’s insistence on an “objective” basis for the resurrection indicates his inability to make the gospel relevant to modern man. On the other hand,

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

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the first thesis of Bultmann offers is: “Christian faith is to be interpreted exhaustively and without remainder as man’s original possibility of authentic historical (*Geschichtlich*) existence as this is more or less adequately clarified and conceptualized by an appropriate philosophical analysis.”⁷⁵ Bultmann reduces the entire contents of the traditional Christian confession to one fundamental assertion: “I henceforth understand myself no longer in terms of my past, but solely in terms of the future that is here and now disclosed to me as grace in my encounter with the church’s proclamation.”⁷⁶

If modern man is to accept the biblical story of creation, fall and redemption through Christ this story must be completely demythologized. Then, too, complete demythologization is a demand of faith itself. Bultmann insists that “the true character of the Christian faith as the New Testament understands it becomes clear only when it is interpreted as man’s original possibility of authentic existence.” “Faith is from the outset an ontological possibility of man that appears in the resolve of despair. It is this that makes it possible for man to understand when he is encountered by the *kerygma*.” “If the possibility of Christian existence is anything other than a possibility which belongs to man *qua* man and for realizing which he is therefore responsible from the beginning, he can hardly be held accountable for failing to realize it.”⁷⁷

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 115–116.

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For Bultmann, says Buri, “what is at stake is not merely the continuation in our time of the church’s whole program of evangelization, but also the adequate expression of the Christian faith itself.”⁷⁸

3. Bultmann and Parmenides

We stop our exposition of Ogden’s view long enough to indicate that in his program of existential interpretation Bultmann is, in effect, doing what Parmenides did in his day. Parmenides argued that being and thought are identical. In saying this he assumed that there is no difference between the thought of God as man’s creator and of man as God’s creature. Parmenides was quite consistent when he therefore denied the reality of change. Nothing could be conceded to be real unless it could be shown to be exhaustively penetrable by man’s logical penetration.

Now, modern thought, especially since Kant, may seem to have abandoned this Parmenidean notion by its acceptance of the principle of pure contingency as an aspect of ultimate being. In reality modern forms of thought, including all modern process philosophies and notably including Heidegger’s existential philosophy do not reject the Parmenidean principle of pure staticism but make it correlative to the principle of pure all-inclusive change. In other words, the Parmenidean notion of human conceptual knowledge as an adequate, i.e., exhaustive criterion of the possibility of any form of existence is reduced from a constitutive to a limiting

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

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notion. This is a concession to the finitude of man. Man knows that at no point of time, however far this point may be projected into the future, will he be able to accomplish the exhaustive penetration of all reality. Even Greek thought made a concession at this point by saying that man is not really fully himself in this world. He only participates in divine knowledge and being. There was a non-being—a *my on* in which man also participated. It is this Greek notion of *my on* that modern philosophy since Kant has developed. Man derives the purely contingent aspect of his existence from this non-being. If he did not participate in this Nothing, this pure contingency, man would not be free; if he did not participate in pure, timeless being he would not know himself as free.

Man is, therefore, in the modern view an intersection point between the idea of pure rationalism and determinism on the one hand and of pure irrationalism and indeterminism on the other hand. Cosmic reality is the individual writ large. It must be, or, we might say, the individual is the cosmos writ small. It must be. As cosmic reality must be seen in terms of the complete correlativity between nominalism and realism so individual human being must be seen as participant in this cosmic dialecticism.

In showing that Parmenidean rationalism underlies Bultmann's existential interpretation, Ogden has shown only one aspect of the total picture. The second aspect of Bultmann's view is that of unrestricted contingency and irrationalism. If Bultmann were to totally demythologize the

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traditional Scripture picture of historic teleology beginning with creation and ending with judgment he would, obviously, destroy his own position as well as that of historic Christianity. He would than be back with the old rationalists who reduced all facts to concepts and all concepts to one blank identity in which the self, asserting itself, lost itself without residue.

It was for the very purpose of escaping this self-destruction that Kant introduced the notion of pure contingency as correlative to pure determinism. Following Kant, and seeking to go beyond him, Heidegger speaks of the necessity of starting one's process of self understanding with the expression of amazement at the fact that anything exists at all. But the notion of the utter questionableness of all things is as meaningless as the notion that all reality is lit up to man who is lit up to himself. Man cannot know that he exists without knowing what he is. So also in order to wonder at the fact that anything exists without knowing what it is that he is wondering about, is meaningless. Moreover, Heidegger's idea of the questionableness of all existence constitutes, in effect, a rejection of the historic Christian view as to what the world is. The irrationalism and contingency ideas inherent in his idea of the questionableness of all reality do not constitute an attack on his own Parmenidean principle of demythologizing. There is no such structural inconsistency in Heidegger's views as Ogden suggests there is. Bultmann's irrationalism taken by itself is as destructive of traditional Christianity, as is his rationalism. But irrationalism and rationalism never operate independently of one another,

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certainly not in post-Kantian times. Because they operate in dialectical tension with one another they deceive modern man into thinking that they can help him understand himself and his environment.

4. Modern Man's Self-Deceit

Modern man thinks he understands himself. This is the grand delusion of the day. Goethe expressed the nature of this delusion well when he said that when the individual speaks it is, alas, no longer the individual that speaks. The principle of individuation involved in modern man and, for the matter of that, in ancient philosophy, is that of pure chance. It is the night in which all cows are black or blackness. The principle of speech, of universality, of unity, of light involved in modern philosophy, and for the matter of that in ancient philosophy, is that of abstract rationality. It is the day in which all cows are white or whiteness.

Having adopted the dialectical view inherent in this correlativity between pure rationalism and pure irrationalism the modern scientist and the modern philosopher are unable to identify any one fact of nature or of history from any other fact of nature or of history. On the one hand every fact must be the same as every other fact. Only then can it be known at all for to be known at all a fact must be known adequately, i.e., exhaustively. On the other hand every fact must be absolutely different from every other fact. Only then can it be known to differ at all from other facts, for to be known to differ it must be known adequately, i.e., exhaustively how it differs. It is thus that complete determinism and complete

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indeterminism or complete rationalism and complete irrationalism must each be completely destructive of one another, as friendly enemies, in order, to oppose their common, real enemy, namely, Christianity.

Now the grandest self-deception of modern times is found among Christian theologians who build their theological structure on top of the sinking structure of modern science and philosophy. Bultmann's theology is a case in point.

Bultmann assumes that modern philosophy and science have furnished him with an intelligible basis for human self-understanding. Ogden points out that Bultmann's idea of self-understanding involves pure rationalism. He argues that it is on the strength of this rationalism inherent in his principle of existential interpretation that Bultmann demythologizes the traditional view of Christianity. This is true enough but it is also true and more basically true that it is Bultmann's total position, in terms of which he rejects historic Christianity. This total position includes his irrationalism as well as his rationalism. Let us see what Ogden makes of this total position.

Ogden quite rightly notes that Bultmann's total position is not expressed by his rationalism alone. For all his "emphasis on unlimited demythologization" in terms of his rationalism "he is equally insistent that it is because of the event of

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Jesus of Nazareth and it alone that Christian faith or authentic historical existence is factually possible.”⁷⁹

Bultmann distinguishes his theology from philosophy by saying that philosophy does not while theology does accord a necessary place to “a particular historical event.” More specifically according to Bultmann theology has to do not merely with a particular historical fact but with “a unique act of God in Jesus of Nazareth.”⁸⁰

5. Ogden on Going Beyond Bultmann

Ogden does not make the distinction we just made. What he is interested in pointing out is that Bultmann’s total position is internally inconsistent. If the “Christian faith is to be interpreted solely in existential terms as man’s original possibility of authentic self-understanding, then it demonstrably follows that it must be independent of any particular historical occurrence. On the other hand, if the second proposition is true and Christian faith has a necessary connection with a particular historical event, then clearly it may not be interpreted without remainder as man’s original possibility of authentic historicity.

In short, what is involved when these two propositions are affirmed conjointly is the self-contradictory assertion that Christian existence is a historical (*geschichtlich*) possibility open to man as

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

such and yet first becomes possible for him because of a particular historical (*historisch*) event.”⁸¹

We reply that Bultmann’s position is not internally self contradictory in the way that Ogden says it is. Bultmann is quite consistent with himself so long as he keeps his rationalism and his irrationalism in perfect dialectical balance with one another. In fact he is inconsistent with himself and “stultifies” his own position only if he does not keep these in pure correlativity with one another. Of course, Bultmann no more than any one else can keep these two in perfect balance with one another. As soon as they are kept in perfect balance with one another they destroy one another. Yet Bultmann cannot be inconsistent either. If he were to be inconsistent, it would have to be because he does not attain to the perfect correlativity between rationalism and irrationalism which to exist must exist in terms of mutual destruction.

The significance of this situation for Bultmann’s view of the relation between the Jesus of *Historie* and the Christ of *Geschichte* will appear presently. For the moment we must move forward and observe the manner in which Ogden seeks to present a position that is not burdened with any structural inconsistency such as he finds in Bultmann.

Ogden wants to construct an “adequate post-liberal theology.”⁸² To attain to this goal he naturally seeks for a more complete correlativity between

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 154.

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rationalism and irrationalism than that which Bultmann's theology presents.

To attain this he sets down and explicates two main theses as follows: The first thesis reads: "Christian faith is to be interpreted exhaustively and without remainder as man's original possibility of authentic existence as this is clarified and conceptualized by an appropriate philosophical analysis."⁸³

Yet by means of this statement Ogden seeks to go beyond Bultmann in his demand for demythologization. In order to do so he adds the process philosophy of such men as Charles Hartshorn to the existentialism of Heidegger.⁸⁴ This gives him, he thinks, a philosophy that can properly conceptualize reality.

The second thesis reads: "Christian faith is always a 'possibility' in fact because of the unconditioned gift and demand of God's love, which is the ever present ground and end of all created things; the decisive manifestation of this divine love, however, is the event of Jesus of Nazareth, which fulfills and corrects all other manifestations and is the original event of the church and its distinctive word and sacraments."⁸⁵

6. Ogden's Method and Content

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 153.



The first of these two theses summarizes Ogden's "essential method,"⁸⁶ while the second summarizes the "essential content," of the position he develops. The two theses are very closely similar to the two theses of Bultmann but there is one "fundamental" difference. Ogden's theses are, he says, "so stated as to overcome the structural inconsistency of Bultmann's position."⁸⁷

Of special interest to us is Ogden's contention that his theses do better justice to the "decisive event of divine manifestation."⁸⁸ This refers, of course, to the question of significance of Jesus. To indicate the true significance of Jesus, Ogden argues, we need only to look into the New Testament. Its most basic teaching is "that man is a genuinely free and responsible being, and therefore his salvation is something that is *coram deo*, he himself has to decide by his understanding of his existence."⁸⁹ This is also precisely the premise, on which modern man stands when he considers the claims of the gospel. Modern man has, therefore, not the least objection against accepting this sort of gospel. But why should modern man accept "just this particular gospel," the gospel of which Jesus is the center?⁹⁰ The answer is that it is this particular gospel that answers exactly to the idea of the freedom which modern man cherishes. The gospel of Jesus is a gospel of the freedom of God. Emil Brunner says quite rightly that "the very 'content of Holy Scripture' is this

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

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‘relationship of personal correspondence’ in which the freedom of God and the freedom of man are taken with complete seriousness.”⁹¹

Ogden refers, in this connection to Romans 1:20. Here original men are said to be “without excuse,” because “what can be known about God is plain to them.” This “leaves no doubt that the content of this primordial revelation is precisely identical with the ‘new’ knowledge now to be laid hold of in the ‘obedience of faith.’ ” Men are “utterly and radically responsible because God has always made himself known to them as gracious Father and has thereby deprived them of all excuse for their self-willed estrangement from his holy presence.”⁹²

Ogden refers, secondly 1 Corinthians 15:28 in which Paul says that the son shall be subject to the Father “that God may be everything to every one” (1 Cor 15:28). Can we doubt that “the peculiarly Christian economy of salvation has a definite subordinate role in the ultimate outworking of God’s purposes?” “Therefore, we repeat that the only ground of salvation the New Testament knows anything about is the primordial love of God, which is indeed decisively revealed in Jesus the Christ, but is by no means simply to be identified with him.” Ogden refers further to Matthew 25:31–46. This passage shows, says Ogden, that “the only final condition for sharing the authentic life is a condition that can be formulated in complete abstraction from the event Jesus of Nazareth and all that is specifically

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 142.

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imports.”⁹³ Thus, “so far from being something independently significant, the demand for faith in Jesus the Christ, rightly understood, is simply a transparent means for expressing this original always standing against our lives.”⁹⁴

Only thus are we prepared to “understand the inmost meaning of faith in Jesus Christ itself.”⁹⁵ We have herewith reached the position that we have a Christ Without Myth.

We have now reached the position where we can do full justice at last to the principle of Protestantism, i.e., to the idea of salvation without works. “It has rarely been seen that God saves man by grace alone in complete freedom from any saving ‘work’ traditionally portrayed in the doctrines of the person and work of Christ.”⁹⁶

We have also reached the position where we express a really “reformed christology and soteriology—.”⁹⁷

We may now fulfill the “historic calling of Protestantism” by opposing the “heresy of works-righteousness in all the forms it assumes in the life and doctrine of the Christian church.”⁹⁸

7. Ogden’s “Sovereign Grace”

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

It is therefore in the interest of removing every form of works-righteousness that Ogden speaks of the decisive nature of the revelation of the love of God in Christ. This revelation of God in Christ would not be decisive for Ogden, if the teachings of the Protestant creeds with respect to the person and work of Christ were to be accepted as true. These doctrines are, to be sure, in accord with a mythological understanding of the Scripture. But when we have thoroughly demythologized the scriptural language of creation, sin and atonement, then we have also purified ourselves of the historic creeds of Christendom.

Ogden has performed the task of demythologizing the New Testament more thoroughly than Bultmann did it because he carried through the idea that God is inherently, from the beginning, absolutely gracious to all men more consistently than Bultmann did. Unless “the theocentric basis and sanction of ‘Christocentrism’ is explicitly acknowledged, emphasis on Jesus Christ can be a snare and a delusion and a mere travesty of authentic apostolic faith.’... Contrary to Bultmann ... the New Testament does not affirm that in Christ our salvation ‘becomes possible.’ It affirms, rather, that in him what has always been possible now ‘becomes manifest’ in the sense of being decisively presented in a human word of witness. Its message is not that God ‘is the one who must be reconciled’, which, as Tillich has rightly argued, is the unavoidable implication of the first affirmation, but

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that 'God who is eternally reconciled, wants us to be reconciled to him.' ⁹⁹

Ogden thinks that he has now attained a theological position which has overcome the structural inconsistency in Bultmann's theology. Bultmann maintained, quite rightly, that the ideal of authentic human existence is clearly seen by man himself prior to any relation he may have to Jesus. Even the possibility of the realization is, at least in principle, present within every man. However, Bultmann also insists that the factual realization of the ideal of authentic human life depends on faith in Jesus Christ. These two claims are internally inconsistent. "When Bultmann affirms that authentic historical existence is factually possible only as faith in Jesus Christ, he completely frustrates at least one of his motives for insisting that Christian faith is nothing other than authentic selfunderstanding." ¹⁰⁰

Ogden thinks he has overcome this structural inconsistency in Bultmann's theology by demythologizing the Christ of the New Testament more thoroughly than Bultmann had done. This he has done by showing that in the New Testament and particularly in Paul man naturally knows what "may be known of God." Jesus Christ is not indispensable for the self-authentic existence of man. The "only" ground of salvation the New Testament knows anything about is the primordial love of God which is indeed decisively revealed in

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

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Jesus the Christ, but is by no means simply to be identified with him.”¹⁰¹

8. Ogden’s “Structural Inconsistency”

In reflecting on Ogden’s criticism of Bultmann we observe that his own position is marked by the same “structural inconsistency” that he has discovered in Bultmann. This was unavoidable. Ogden works with the very same principles of hermeneutics that he discovers in Bultmann. He has essentially the same notion of human self understanding that Bultmann has. It is the idea of autonomous human freedom. Ogden has the same principles of unification and of differentiation that Bultmann has, i.e., absolute rationalism and absolute irrationalism taken in total correlativity to one another. Modern man interprets himself and the whole of his environment by means of himself as autonomous or free and as the ultimate source of the categorization of the purely contingent being that surrounds him.

Modern man has, says Richard Kroner, attained to the principle of pure inwardness. This principle was already present in principle in Greek philosophy, notably so in Socrates. This principle reached its climax in Kant’s philosophy. Post-Kantian thinkers vie with one another in seeking to make the Kantian idea of the self as the final point of reference in all predication more consistent with itself. Existential philosophy and existential theology are seeking to do just that by means of their

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

existential interpretation of man and his cosmos. To do this they vie with one another in removing the last remnants of “objectivism” from their thought. In particular the traditional teaching of the direct revelation of God in “the works of creation and redemption,” of creation, atonement and judgment must be demythologized.

But how far can one go with the process of demythologizing. If carried through to the end it would lead, as Parmenides required, to the complete destruction of all historical existence. The self must understand himself by allowing himself to be absorbed in a principle of pure identity. It is as if you managed, somehow, to get into a turnpike but found no exit anywhere nor any plazas where you could eat and have your car serviced.

We ask, therefore, by what right Ogden speaks of a decisive revelation of God’s primordial relation of grace to man. On his principles he would not be able to indicate how there could be revelation of God to any man in history anywhere, let alone any decisive revelation.

In saying this we are not forgetting that Ogden appeals to the creation idea as indicating the presence of God’s grace with man. In order to serve as an indication of the presence of God’s primordial grace with man the idea of creation must, for Ogden, first be properly demythologized and then properly remythologized.

Bultmann has performed the demythologization and Barth has performed the remythologization. We

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have done with all such notions as Luther and Calvin had of a God, existing independently prior to the world who by fiat creation brought the world into existence. Instead of this we have the notion of pure contingency as this underlies all modern science and philosophy, for our concept of creation. This notion of pure contingency serves Ogden as it serves modern theologians in general as the atmosphere of freedom and decision for man. Unfortunately this source of freedom is, by the fact that it is the absolute source, also the grave of freedom. By virtue of it man's existence is, in the language of Heidegger, existence unto death. As soon as man is really an individual escaping from determinism he dies as an individual. His birth is his death. Any effort to resuscitate him must be accomplished by a machine of pure rationalism and determinism. As soon as he is resuscitated by escaping from the bottomless ocean of pure contingency he again dies as an individual. Once more his first breath is his last. Or, rather on the view entertained by Ogden as well as by Bultmann man must die simultaneously in opposite directions in order to live. To speak of the idea of the primordial grace of this God of pure contingency as being present with man is, indeed, to identify the man of theology with the man of modern philosophy and science but it is, at the same time, to cut him loose from the God and the Christ of Scripture in whom he lives and moves and has his being.

9. Back to Fuchs and Ebeling from Ogden Via Buri and Dillenberger

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We work back now from Ogden, by way of Buri and Dillenberger to Fuchs and Ebeling. We ask about the nature of Jesus Christ as he is thought of in each case.

Basic to the thinking of each one of these men is the desire to show modern man that, in the words of Fuchs, it “makes sense” for modern man, to “believe in Jesus.” Modern man cannot be blamed for not accepting the Jesus Christ of either Barth or Brunner. Neither of these men has adequately demythologized the Chalcedon creed and all it presupposes and implies because neither of them has fully caught the revolutionary significance of the historicness of man and the cosmos. Bultmann did better on this score than did Barth but even he appealed to some sort of final revelation of reality in the space-time world.

Did not Kant tell us that we can know nothing of the world of noumena?

But right here is the point where all of these men fail in their effort to go beyond Barth and Bultmann. They cannot consistently apply Kant’s rigid separation between the world of phenomena and the world of noumena, anymore than Barth or Bultmann could or than Kant himself could. If Kant were going to maintain his absolute dualism between these two worlds, he would have had to be an absolute monist of the sort that Parmenides tried to be. Kant has no more intelligible reason for saying that man knows the phenomenal world than he has for saying that man does not know the noumenal world. Kant has no intelligible reason for

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saying that by concepts man knows the phenomenal world and by productive imagination man has awareness of the noumenal world, and its relation to the phenomenal world.

In Kant's thinking the idea of pure contingency permeates equally both his noumenal and his phenomenal world. When man knows, i.e., relates "facts" conceptually to one another he must know exhaustively. If he does not have all of reality, with all its basic contingency under his control exhaustively, his entire system will collapse. Man must have the full answer to the question what he himself is and what the nature of his environment is or there is no meaning to his asking his questions. On the other hand if there is available to man anywhere, whether in the phenomenal or in the noumenal any answer to any question about any subject then there is no intelligible possibility of asking any questions on any point.

Herein consists the monism that underlies Kant's "dualism." It is the monism composed of the idea of the complete correlativity of pure staticism and pure flux. And this idea of correlativity is based on the assumption of the total self-sufficient inwardness of man.

Heidegger follows in the line of Kant's principle of human inwardness by making his idea of the utter questionableness of the being of man and the cosmos correlative to the notion that is implied in this utter questionableness, i.e., the notion that ultimate being is light and no darkness at all. Heidegger stands in utter amazement before the fact

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that anything exists and in this amazement gives expression to the idea that ultimate reality cannot be any such thing as the Reformers say it is.

Barth and Bultmann construct their views of Jesus Christ in terms of practically the same principle of hermeneutic that Heidegger uses. Barth's "rejection" of all the existentialism of Heidegger and Bultmann's "modification" of it are alike calculated to carry the principle of human inwardness forward to its conclusion.

As Fuchs and Ebeling, Dillenger, Buri and Ogden go beyond Barth and/or Bultmann they do so in the interest of showing modern man that there is absolutely nothing to be found in the narrative of the Old and New Testament that need be unacceptable to him. Everybody today, the scientist, the philosopher, as well as the man of religion, accepts the idea of the utterly mysterious nature of ultimate reality. In the nature of the case, it is said, no human being knows or even can know anything about the nature of ultimate reality.

When the authors of the various writings of Scriptures speak of God as man's creator and of Christ as man's redeemer or of the Holy Spirit as man's sanctifier they were, of course, in their idiom, speaking forth the nature of this ultimate being. They, with all of us, have an awareness of this ultimate being.

When Jesus of Nazareth said: "I and the Father are one" he gave striking, some of us might say, decisive expression to his faith in this ultimate

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mystery of being. When Jesus reveals the Father to us in all his unconditional love to all of us he is, more vigorously than most of us, if not than all of us, tolling the silent voice of this being.

When God the Father creates us, when God the Son redeems us and when God the Holy Spirit sanctifies us, it is the one principle of spiritual perfection that stands before all of us as our ideal. When the story of man's beginning and ending is placed before us in terms of a succession of days and months and years this is but a means by which we are lured to look into the heart of God's all enveloping love toward man. The temporalistic eschatology that seemed to beguile even Jesus is, particularly in his case, but a pointer toward the genuine eschatology that is involved in the freedom of God for man and the freedom of man for God.

Do not turn away from the message of the New Testament because of the dogmatic, objectivistic manner in which it comes to you. We too, as well as they, have to reveal, i.e., manifest the light of love that wells up within the hearts of all of us in the language of the I-it dimension in which we all live. Are not all of us in the paradoxical position of having to take off from the phenomenal realm on the wings of the negation of concepts supposedly applicable to the noumenal realm in order, after we have reached what we hope is the noumenal realm, then to return to the phenomenal realm which is, at its best, as we hope, "subordinate to" the noumenal realm? So you see that Jesus is not, as misguided literalists assume, the object but the ground of faith. He is the "author and finisher of our faith." As truly man with us in all

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our limitation, he feels the presence of the noumenal upon him more strongly than do the rest of us. Why Jesus should feel this presence more strongly than the rest of us is, of course, utterly mysterious. To understand at all what Jesus means, we must realize that the ultimate contingency of philosophy is, at the same time, the God of universal grace to all men. To understand what Jesus means we should have to have in us the inherent ability to penetrate not only what he says but also why it is that what he says is true. This is what Parmenides has taught us, and what Kant made us understand better than ever before by showing that all understanding is and must be based on man himself as come forth from pure contingency.

But then, when we understand the nature of our own self-understanding as operating within the ocean of bottomless and shoreless contingency this also helps us to see that, to be truly man, Jesus had with us to consider himself as limited, as we are limited and therefore as unable as, we are to say one word about that realm.

All this brings Jesus Christ close to us. What he says is, what all of us have always said or at least meant to say. He said what he said because he could say nothing new or different from what all of us have always said. At the same time what he said was absolutely new and absolutely different from what all men have always said even what any man says anywhere and any time is absolutely different from what any one else has said, anywhere and any time.

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The idea of the linguisticity of being of which Fuchs and Ebeling speak thus appears to be a new means and yet not a new means by which they, as modern theologians, are joining modern philosophers and modern scientists in order to suppress the truth of what the Christ of the Scriptures speaks.

The Christ of the Scriptures identifies himself as truly God and truly man. When he says that he and the Father are one this implies a *Lichtungsgeschichte* the exact reverse of that of Heidegger. God is light and in him is no darkness at all. All the works of God manifest his presence clearly. As made in the image and likeness of God man naturally knows God. Rom 1 Everything else he knows because, more basically, he knows God. Every fact in the history of the universe and of mankind is what it is, in the last analysis, because of the plan of God. The evil in the world is what it is, in the last analysis, because man wilfully disobeyed God at the beginning of history and continues wilfully to disobey the will of God expressed in the world of his creation. For this sin man is subject to the wrath of God. Jesus Christ the Son of God and Son of Man died for sinful men that they might be set free from the slavery of sin and live in and with the risen Christ. The Holy Spirit completes the work of the triune God in creating and redeeming sinful men by working faith in their hearts so that they accept the grace of God given them in Christ.

This, broadly stated, is the message of the Scriptures as a whole and of the New Testament in particular. It is this message that Satan has inspired

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sinful men to repress. The most efficient way of repressing this message is to reinterpret it so as to make it innocuous. Modern science, modern philosophy and modern theology do this by means of an epistemology in which the revelation of God to man is turned into a revelation from man to himself. In its desire to be genuinely scientific and philosophical modern theology weaves every word it uses into a pattern of revelation and response that amounts to ventriloquism. The New Hermeneutic is the currently most popular method of reinterpreting the significance of Jesus the Christ so as to make it fully acceptable to the natural man.

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Chapter 3:

Reaction of Some Orthodox Theologians

We turn now to a discussion of some of the evaluations of the New Hermeneutic given by orthodox, more specifically Reformed, theologians. We shall deal with three of these. The first is A. D. R. Polman of Kampen. Dr. Polman is of special help to us because he sets the new hermeneutical movement in the context of its historical



background. The second is an evaluation by H. M. Kuitert of the Free University of Amsterdam. Dr. Kuitert seeks to reconstruct Reformed theology so as to be able to meet modern movements of thought like the New Hermeneutic on their own ground of historical understanding without losing his starting point in the tradition of the historic Christian faith. The third evaluation is by Dr. S. U. Zuidema, also of the Free University of Amsterdam. Dr. Zuidema seeks, to give a strictly biblical and historically Reformed analysis and criticism of men like Bultmann, Fuchs and Ebeling.

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A. A. D. R. Polman

Dr. Polman is writing a series of monographs under the general heading Reformed Catholic Dogmatics (*Gereformeerd Katholieke Dogmatiek*). The first of these monographs bears the title Under the Spell of Hermeneutic (*In de Ban der Hermeneutiek*). It is this monograph that concerns us here.

Polman begins with a survey of nineteenth and twentieth century theology as a whole. According to many leading theologians, such as Bultmann, Tillich, Fuchs, Ebeling and others, says Polman, the dogmatic procedure of earlier theology has become “impossible.” Scripture research has proved conclusively that the Bible offers no unified doctrinal truth.¹

In the second place dogmatic theology is said to be illegitimate. “Every dogmatics is the fruit of objectifying thought.”²

In the third place dogmatic theology is pointless (*onzakelyk*). It does not answer to the facts of divine revelation and the biblical view of truth. Accordingly it does not correspond to human existence and the nature of understanding.

¹ A. D. R. Polman, “In de Ban der Hermeneutiek,” *Gereformeerd Katholieke Dogmatiek*, Volume 1 (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1969), p. 7.

² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

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In the fourth place a dogmatic approach to theology serves no useful purpose (*ondoelmatig*) in the modern world with its dislike of all metaphysics and abstract concept-formation.³

1. Under the Spell of Hermeneutic

Keeping these four points in mind we sketch the background of recent movement in theology, the new hermeneutic among them as Polman sees it.

A. The *Aufklärung* (1650–1780)

The *Aufklärung* was the daughter of the Renaissance and of humanism. By and large it is characterized (1) by the subject-object scheme of thought, (2) by emancipation from all authority and the declaration of autonomy (3) by an unhistorical approach to reality. Descartes had no place for history because it furnished no exact knowledge and Lessing found a big ugly ditch between rational truth and the facts of orthodox Christianity.

B. Kant's General Approach

As to Kant, says Polman, we can scarcely overrate his importance as a background for our understanding of recent hermeneutics.

Kant says that the *Aufklärung* rightly released man from all authority and brought him to maturity. Man can and should accept as true only that which he has, by his own categories of perception and understanding, been able to organize into a logically

³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.



consistent whole. Thus man himself creates the world. Not, of course, as though he produced the raw stuff of his experience. But prior to man's own ordering activity with respect to it, this raw stuff is formless. Only that is, scientifically speaking, real and true for me which I, myself, have moulded by my observing and conceptualizing activity. I therefore know no reality beyond that which I, as the subject of knowledge, have absorbed into my sphere of influence.

What then about God, about myself as free and about my own life after death? Can we even speak of these matters? Yes, we may speak of them, but not by means of conceptual, theoretical knowledge. We can have no information about God and the free human self in the way we have information about facts in the space-time world. We may, however, believe in them. In fact by insisting that knowledge is exclusively conceptual we have restricted its outreach. How could God as absolutely transcendent above man and therefore as absolutely free reveal himself to us by the avenue of conceptual knowledge? If God could reveal himself thus, he would no longer be God. Yet we may and must speak of God, but then we must do so not by means of concepts as constitutive of knowledge but by means of concepts as pointers. Thus, even though we must conceptually make an absolute contrast between the world of science, the world of phenomena and the world of religion, i.e., the world of noumena, we must also have faith that somehow the world of noumena makes its presence felt in the world of phenomena. In fact we must limit

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knowledge for the very purpose of making room for faith.

(1) Kant's Ideas of Autonomy, of Abstract Rationality and of Contingency

In this very brief statement of Kant's philosophy given by Polman we meet the three points discussed earlier.

(a) There is, basic to all else, the idea of human autonomy or freedom. Paul says that after the fall of Adam man makes God in his image. He represses the truth about himself as the creature made by God.

As the responsible heirs of Adam's rebellion all men, from the earliest times to the present, start with this assumption of human autonomy. Kant did not invent this principle of autonomy or self-sufficient inwardness. He merely expressed it more consistently than did his predecessors.

(b) The principle of man's autonomy requires for its maintenance a certain view of the cosmos as man's environment. It requires the idea of the complete featurelessness of the world till man acts upon it by his original organizing activity. That is to say, it requires the complete, exhaustive, cleaning out of any type of factual existence that does not owe its character exclusively to man's original categorizing activity. Only when the universe is completely open, i.e., free from the control of God, will the autonomous man be able to live authentically. Thus the idea of pure contingency is,

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for Kant, involved as it involves the notion of pure human autonomy.

Again it must be said that Kant did not invent this notion. It came into the world when Adam declared his autonomy. How could he be free if there were a creator-God who ultimately controlled his environment and thereby hampered his movements. How could he react responsibly with respect to the world if some one other than himself was, more basically than himself, ultimately directing its course. Even the Greeks contended that without non-being, i.e., pure contingency, man would be swallowed up by determinism. Kant merely expressed autonomous man's need for pure contingency more consistently than the Greeks had done.

(c) Finally, as autonomous man needs a world of pure contingency so he also needs as correlative to it, a world of pure rationality and pure determinism. He must be able and he alone must be able to determine what can and must exist. How could he be free to develop himself according to his own ideals if some independently existing power, some God, could arbitrarily decide the issues of life and death for him. The categories of rationality must have their ultimate loves in man, not in God.

Once more, Kant did not invent this idea of pure rationalism and determinism, he merely gave more consistent expression to it than any one before him had done. How could man understand himself in relation to his universe if there were a God who had

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a “rational” plan of his own prior to and independent of that of man?

Kant’s originality lies in the clear insight that his own view of human freedom as independence from the God of historic Christianity requires for its correlative a universe that is also free from God. Seeing this fact, Kant also saw, more clearly than anyone before him, the need for relating pure determinism and pure indeterminism (and, therefore, pure rationalism and pure irrationalism) correlatively, i.e., to one another.

Would-be autonomous man needs both. Without both pure rationalism and pure determinism he would understand nothing. Kant may on the surface seem to reject the concept of truth as the “*adaequatio rei et intellectus*.” Does he not limit the reach of the intellect to the realm of the phenomenal? Does he not insist that man has no knowledge of the noumenal realm at all? The answer is that by his assumption of human autonomy as correlative to the ideas of pure rationality and pure irrationality (which are again correlative to one another) Kant excludes the idea of not merely the actual but even the idea of the possible existence of the God who creates and directs the world. Kant thinks he knows that such a God cannot exist. He knows what the nature of ultimate reality must be prior to his having any awareness of the distinctive character of any space-time fact. Kant knows what ultimate reality must not be because he knows what it must be. What the theologian preacher says about reality cannot be true; there can be no creation by God, and no

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incarnation of the Son of God. There can be no regeneration of man by the Spirit of God. Reality must be such that these “facts” Cannot be owned by a self-respecting free man.

(2) Kant's Four Rules of Hermeneutics

Here then we see how modern man conceives of himself and his world. In his three *Critiques* Kant worked the matter out with great care. It remains to see how Kant dealt with Scripture and its teachings. Naturally, Kant reinterpreted both. He provided the rules for this reinterpretation. We listen to Polman again.

First the idea of human consciousness as sufficient to itself and therefore as the source of the categories to be employed to determine what can or cannot exist in fact, must be taken as basic for the reinterpretation of any teaching of Scripture. Scripture contains some teachings that utterly transcend and others that go directly against man's practical reason. No one can understand anything of the scriptural teaching with respect to the triune nature of God or with respect to incarnation of one of the persons of the trinity. These teachings must be rejected as objective facts but they may possibly be accepted after they have been reinterpreted. Thus the incarnation may be accepted if it is taken to mean the rational man's ideal of goodness.

On the other hand such a teaching as predestination goes directly counter to the autonomous man's basic sense of freedom and responsibility. Such teaching, together with all

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anthropomorphic statements about God, must be rejected.

Secondly, nothing is to be believed on the authority of Scripture as such; the standard of faith is what man's practical reason regards as morally profitable.

Thirdly, as man's moral sense must set its own ideals, it must also be thought of as having inherent in itself the propelling power to go forward toward the attainment of those ideals. The idea of a higher enabling power must be rejected.

Lastly, inasmuch as man is obviously unable to attain to the realization of his moral ideals, he may in faith expect their realization after this life.

He who observes these four hermeneutical rules may make the message of the New Testament acceptable to modern man. He can interpret Christianity so as to make it practicable and useful. He can interpret it so that it can be a help to him in his desire to lead a true moral life. He has had revelation speak to us through the concepts of our understanding. He has appealed to our plenary moral ability to do what we ought to do. He has held out a hope for us that cannot end in delusion.

These four rules of Kant's hermeneutics contain nothing significantly different from what we have expressed under the idea of human autonomy or freedom, the idea of pure contingency and the idea of pure determinism as correlative to one another. The reinterpretation of historic Christianity which

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Kant offers in terms of his hermeneutical rules is, accordingly, largely similar to that which recent philosophers of religion and recent theologians offer. A glance at the teachings of Barth, Bultmann and their followers (who seek to go beyond them) shows that their program of an existential interpretation of Scripture follows closely in the direction suggested by Kant.

For the moment we must trace the degree of this similarity by following Polman in his discussion of the father of modern theologians, Friedrich Schleiermacher and his spiritual followers.

C. Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768–1839)

Friedrich Schleiermacher, called the father of modern theology, may also properly be called the father of modern hermeneutics. “Many men, such as Gadamer, Fuchs, Ebeling, go so far as to honor Schleiermacher as the great inaugurator of the new hermeneutic because of the fact that he has drawn it within the horizon of transcendental problematics.” Schleiermacher brought about a Copernican revolution in the field of hermeneutic, says Polman, making the problem of understanding foundational to every act of interpretation. “Before every explanation he posed the questions: What really is understanding? How can I understand? What can I understand? Thus he transcendentalizes hermeneutic and tries to determine the possibilities

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of understanding from general transcendental considerations.”⁴

We need not necessarily place Schleiermacher where these men place him, says Polman, but we may assert that the way of Schleiermacher is the way of fascination with hermeneutic.

The starting point of hermeneutic, Schleiermacher contends, is to be found in man’s sense of absolute dependence. Man starts his interpretation of himself and his world, not on the basis of observation, or conceptual interpretation of any space-time fact, or facts, but on his own sense of absolute dependence, (*schlechthinnes Abhängigkeitsgefühl*).

Accordingly, the traditional method of dogma construction must be abandoned. The human rather than the divine subject must be taken as the final reference-point in predication. Only if this is done is there understanding of revelation and genuinely responsible action with respect to it.⁵

The principle of unity that man needs for his interpretative enterprise must be entirely without content. If it had any content, man would lose his self-understanding of freedom. “All forms of thought, which are not, in the last analysis, based on inner experience have no value in theology.”⁶

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁶ *Ibid.*

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It goes without saying that the purely contingent principle of individuation as correlative to a purely formal principle of unification is part of Schleiermacher's total hermeneutic.

It is well that we keep the completely man-centered character of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics in mind. Unless we do we may readily be deceived by the orthodox-sounding words he uses in his work on *The Christian Faith*. By the sound of words one might think that Schleiermacher's theology is based on a Reformational outlook. To be sure, Schleiermacher says that he cannot fit the resurrection and the ascension of Christ into his "system" of theology.⁷ Even so he accepts the resurrection and ascension as "facts." He accepts them as such because the Bible records them. But to accept them as constitutive of my system, says Schleiermacher, in effect, would mean for me to understand them as an aid toward my life in Christ. This I cannot do.

From this attitude toward Christ we can see what Schleiermacher means when he says that in Christianity "everything is related to the redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth."⁸ According to Schleiermacher, Jesus is what he must be according to the requirements of his hermeneutical principles: these are based on his notion of man's sense of absolute dependence on God who is "in the first

⁷ Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), p. 417.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

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instance—simply that which is co-determinant of this feeling” of absolute dependence.⁹

Sin is, accordingly, not a transgressing of a “positive” law of God; rather it is a consciousness that the good inherent in man and ideally before man has not been retained and attained. Human evil, exists “only as attached to good, and sin only as attached to grace.”¹⁰ Sin was “ordained only in view of redemption.”¹¹

It is in terms of these principles that Jesus attains his universal significance through his uniqueness. Jesus must be a miraculous appearance (*eine wunderbare Erscheinung*). How else could a new corporate life be established among men? On the other hand as a marvelous appearance, his nature must be in harmony with the analogy of human nature. Human nature has the possibility of taking the divine into itself, and in Jesus this possibility was realized. Thus the “identity of human nature ... involves this, that the manner in which Christ differs from all others also has its place in this identity.”¹²

This brief look at Schleiermacher’s hermeneutic enables us to see that Fuchs had good reason for thinking of him as the father of modern hermeneutics. However, the question to be considered then is whether the new hermeneutic is really very new. This question is not a matter of curiosity or of originality. It is a question of

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 327.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 386.

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understanding. Setting the new hermeneutic in a wider contemporary context and a wider historical context puts us in better position for its evaluation.

The new hermeneutic, says James M. Robinson, began with the appearance of Barth's Romans.¹³ In this work, he says, "the hermeneutical relevance of the subject" is, for the first time, fully realized.¹⁴ But we have seen that, as Fuchs says, Schleiermacher was always asking what understanding means. We have also seen that it is Kant who really went as far as any man could go in asserting that man must understand himself and, in understanding himself, understand the world in terms of the principle of inwardness. We have seen, too, that this principle of inwardness and therefore of exclusively immanentistic interpretation of man and his world was already controlling the methodology of the Greeks. Finally we have seen that this principle of inwardness was introduced into the world at the beginning of history by Adam. But to say this is to speak from the point of view of historic Protestantism. It is to say with Calvin that man's self-understanding is a factual derivative from a deeper God-understanding. There can be no intelligible dialogue between one who follows Calvin, as Calvin followed Paul, and modern man except by bringing the difference of their two starting points into consideration from the beginning.

¹³James M. Robinson, "Hermeneutic Since Barth," in *New Frontiers in Theology, Volume 2 The New Hermeneutic*, ed. James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 2:22.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 23.

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Historic Roman Catholicism constructed its philosophy and its natural theology on the metaphysical and epistemological view of the Greeks, especially of Aristotle. The theology of traditional Roman Catholic thinking seeks to build on the revelation of God in Scripture. When this supernatural theology based on revelation is then added to natural theology based on “reason” the result is compromise and confusion.

One cannot expect, then, that Roman Catholic theology will do anything but make an alliance with modern post-Kantian theology and with the new hermeneutic. The hermeneutical principles of a theology based on the analogy idea of Aristotle and those based on the analogy idea of Kant will naturally join forces against a theology based on the hermeneutical principles of the Reformation.

D. Albrecht Benjamin Ritschl (1822–1889)

We continue to follow Polman as he goes on from Schleiermacher to Ritschl. In Ritschl’s thinking the “Copernican revolution” of Kant’s philosophy finds an even more striking expression than it does in the thinking of Schleiermacher. Ritschl’s theology is more obviously Kantian than was that of Schleiermacher. True, Ritschl does not follow Kant, in reducing religion to morality. At this point he wants to go beyond Kant. But by going beyond Kant, he is, he thinks, more true to the real significance of Kant’s revolution. Our interest is naturally in this “theological difference.” This theological difference appears particularly at the point of Ritschl’s view of the Jesus of history.

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To grasp what Ritschl means by the Jesus of history is of value to us for an understanding of what the dialectical theologians, in reaction to “old liberalism,” and what the men of the new hermeneutic and of the “new quest for the historical Jesus” mean by the historical Jesus.

Polman points out the fact that Ritschl accepts the critical philosophy of Kant with its transcendental methodology, as over against the “transcendent view of truth” of Plato and Aristotle. Ritschl is concerned to make the principles of Kant’s critical philosophy fruitful for an interpretation of the gospel to modern man. Roman Catholic and Protestant scholasticism was based on the transcendent view of truth of the Greeks. “By means of it God and man were reduced to objects, to objective truths, which could be known in themselves, apart from all revelation. In their doctrine of God they spoke of God as *ens realissimum*, *summum bonum*, *ens absolutum* and thus arrived at the unhappy distinction between God as he is in himself and as he is for us.”¹⁵

Kant has helped us, Ritschl argues, to escape this fatal bifurcation. He has done so by restricting knowledge to the world of phenomena and thus making room for faith. We know nothing of God, but what a joy this is for now we can believe in God. At last science can be really science and religion can be really religion. Science deals with judgments of fact and religion with judgments of value. At last modern man can have a true foundation for science in Kant’s

¹⁵ Polman, “*In de Ban der Hermeneutik*,” p. 24.

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Critique of Theoretical Reason and a true basis for faith in Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*. The basic point is, of course, that now at last, man can realize his own interior freedom and in doing so understand himself without reference to exterior determining influences. "The transcendental hermeneutical method, applied to his theology, borrows from philosophy the description of the addressability of human subjectivity, which has been discovered and exposed by the practical reason."¹⁶

The religious value of God's revelation to man in Christ is, for Ritschl, determined in reference to this "free" man. By thus measuring the significance of revelation to man as free and addressable by God, Ritschl discovers not a God-in-himself and a man-in-himself, but a God-for-man and a man-for-God.¹⁷

In our own words we note that with Kant Ritschl virtually makes man, the creature, take the place of the God of historic Christianity. Nothing that exists has any significance for man except as it is usable by man for his development as an autonomous or free moral and spiritual self. By his transcendental deduction of man's categories of interpretation, Kant has enabled us really to understand what we claim to understand, and really to believe what we should claim to believe. As a consequence nothing that comes to us "from without" has any significance for us until it has become a part of us in our program of self-realization. By means of our principle of unity, we are in a position to exclude the dualism between

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

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a God who has existence and knowledge by himself, and a man who has existence and knowledge by himself. By means of our principle of individuation we are in a position to exclude the monism in which man's thinking and acting is determined by God's thinking and acting.

(1) Ritschl on the Jesus of History

It thus appears that Ritschl thinks he is able to give what is today called an existential interpretation of man and his world, and, on the basis of it, to "demythologize" the traditional Christian position. We are on the way from Kant and Schleiermacher to Fuchs and Ebeling.

It remains to note how far Ritschl has gone beyond Schleiermacher toward recent dialectical developments in theology. For this purpose we ask Ritschl what he means by the Jesus of history. Surely this Jesus of history must not be the Jesus Christ of the Chalcedon creed. The Christ of the Chalcedon creed was, on Ritschl's view, the product of an effort to artificially splice together a God-in-himself and a man-in-himself. Faith in the Christ of Chalcedon is not faith, properly speaking, at all; it is the product of an arbitrarily given regeneration in the hearts of pre-determined men. Surely Christ must be wholly known to us in order to be known by us at all and at the same time Christ must reveal a God who is wholly unknown and unknowable to us in order to be God at all. This much is obviously contained in the Kantian epistemology underlying much of Ritschl's theology. But this much is also in principle

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present in Schleiermacher. How then does Ritschl's Christ differ from Schleiermacher's Christ?

Ritschl himself tells us that his theology as a whole differs from that of Schleiermacher in that he starts his theology from the historical Christ instead of from human consciousness. Surely, we say spontaneously, this is a great advance. Says Hugh Ross Mackintosh: "By insisting that the Christian mind must at every point of religious belief be guided solely by the revelation of God in Christ, Ritschl did his utmost to expel any and every presumptuous form of Speculative Rationalism; and it may well be that the future historian will reckon this to have been his best service to theology."¹⁸

Even a more conservative theologian than Macintosh, James Orr, says of Ritschl: "It is surely a true and important view to take, that theology must begin with the living and historical Christ."¹⁹

Yet, if we are not to depend merely on the sound of words but on their meanings, then we must ask about the frame of reference in relation to which Ritschl's words about Christ have meaning. With this in mind Orr himself flatly asserts that "for the purpose of the Evangelical church Ritschl's theology is impossible."²⁰ Ritschl's statements are, says Orr, "often evangelical in sound," while they "import something very different."²¹ "Back to the New

¹⁸ Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology*, (London: Nisbet and Co., Ltd., 1937), p. 143.

¹⁹ James Orr, *Ritschlianism*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1903), p. 14.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

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Testament” by way of the Reformation is said to have been Ritschl’s motto but, we add, forward from Kant toward dialecticism was the course he actually followed.

But how could he go forward? He would have to go forward toward the revolution of twentieth century thinking by going beyond the revolution of nineteenth century thinking. He would, that is, have to be more consistently Kantian than Kant himself had been. For theology this meant that he would have to be more consistently true to the principles of Schleiermacher than Schleiermacher himself had been. This meant, basically, that he would have to be more consistently anti-Reformational than Schleiermacher had been. This had to manifest itself in the first place in that the principle of inwardness, the principle of the interior self-sufficiency of man, had to be asserted or assumed with greater determination and with greater intellectual understanding than had been done by Schleiermacher. This in turn implies that the biblical and therefore the Reformational teaching on the self-attesting Christ of Scripture must, with all its implications for man, be rejected even more consistently than was done by Schleiermacher. The historical Christ of Ritschl must be more clearly and exclusively a projection of the self-sufficient moral and religious consciousness of man than was the historical Christ of Schleiermacher.

But Ritschl’s historical Christ could not be more exclusively a projection of man’s religious consciousness than was the historical Christ of Schleiermacher unless he were more exhaustively

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explicable in terms of a timeless unity, and at the same time, and correlative to this, more absolutely unknowable in terms of a purely contingent principle of individuality.

Still further if Ritschl operates more consistently with the hermeneutical principles of Kant than Schleiermacher did, then he must also insist more consistently than Schleiermacher both on the absolute identity of all men with Christ, and on the absolute difference between all men and Christ. But to do this he must, still further, insist that the absolute identity of all men with Christ and their absolute difference from him is identical with the absolute identity with abstract being and the absolute identity with non-being that he finds in himself. In short the historical Jesus of Ritschl must more consistently apply the principle of pure interiority inherent in Kant's view of man, and therefore more clearly present the picture of the anti-Christ sitting in the place of Christ in the Scriptures.

Of course, it is not possible to indicate from Ritschl's writings that he was more consistent than was Schleiermacher on these points. It was not possible for him to be more consistently absolute in his negation of the self-attesting Christ of Scripture than were the absolute negations of historic Christianity on the part of Kant and Schleiermacher. All that Ritschl could do, and all that he did, and all that any one after him could do, was to arrange their absolute negations in differing ways, and in allowing varying measures and ways of inconsistencies to creep into their views. It is these internal inconsistencies on the part of modern post-Kantian

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hermeneutical thinkers that point to the fact that, through all their efforts, they are seeking to suppress the truth of their own creatureliness and sinfulness as Paul (and, after him, Calvin) speaks of it.

In making such serious criticisms of Ritschl's theology, we must be sure we do not misrepresent him. Ritschl wants to start all his theology from the fact of the Christ of history. Over against the mysticism of Schleiermacher, he finds his firm foothold in the Person of Jesus Christ, the revealer of the Father, as set forth in the New Testament. For Ritschl "living faith springs from the soil of past events."²² How can we then fairly say of Ritschl that his Christ is the opposite of the Christ of Luther and of Calvin.

The reason for this lies in his Kantian principles of knowledge in which the subject is all-determinative of the nature of reality. For all his effort to find an objective, historical foundation for his faith by means of his historical Jesus, it remains true that his all-controlling subject determines the nature of this historical object. Dr. G. C. Berkouwer expresses this point well when he says of Ritschl's view: "Whatever has no direct significance for our spiritual personality in its struggle with nature that surrounds it, falls away and cannot be counted as revelation."²³

Professor Berkouwer speaks of Ritschl's theology as a *Bedürfnistheologie*. It is man himself who determines what his spiritual as well as physical

²² Mackintosh, *Modern Theology*, p. 145.

²³ Gerrit Cornelius Berkouwer, *Geloof en Openbaring in de Nieuwere Duitse Theologie* (Utrecht: Kemink en Zoon N.V., 1932), p. 11.

needs are. It is this principle that controls his view of the historic Christ. The Heidelberg Catechism starts out by asking what is necessary for you as a man to know if you are to live and to die in comfort. The answer is that I need to know (a) how great my sins and miseries are, (b) how I may be delivered from my sins and misery and (c) how I may express my gratitude for such deliverance.

But the catechism does not proceed from the idea that man can, of himself, either ask or answer one intelligible question about himself or his world. The assumption throughout, is that it is the self authenticating Christ of Scripture who enables him to give the right answer to the right question. It is the Christ of Scripture who alone can and does tell man what he can know, what he ought to do and what he may hope for in the future.

For Ritschl it is man himself who, with the help of Kant's primacy of the practical reason, constructs his Jesus of history as a ladder by which he may climb up to the Father who is love. Ritschl knows he needs this sort of Christ to tell him what he can know, what he must do and for what he may hope. Yes, indeed, argues Ritschl, I must know how great my sins and miseries are. The catechism is right too in assuming that it is Christ alone who can tell me this. But then this Christ must not and cannot be the Christ of the catechism. The Christ of the catechism tells me that I am a creature of God. But the idea of *creatio ex nihilo* is an irrational idea. It establishes a dualism between God and me. What I need is unity. I need the kind of Christ that can provide such unity. The Christ of the catechism, following the Christ of the

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Chalcedon creed, is himself composed of two elements that cannot be intelligently related to one another. I need a Christ patterned after the Logos idea of the Greeks and remodeled after the principles of Kant's three *Critiques*. I need a Christ through whom I "know" by faith that which contradicts what I "know" by logic—namely, that my personal freedom is higher than my fate! I need a Christ who as my moral ideal commands me what to do, because in commanding me I command myself. I need a Christ who assures me that he will bring out into the open, and to public triumph, the principles of goodness and truth that dwell in the hearts of all men.

E. The Christ of Old Liberalism

It is this Christ, who, is for Ritschl, both his principle of unity and his principle of diversity. It is this sort of Christ who exemplifies the perfect correlativity between the idea of realization of the utter, exhaustive intelligibility of all reality, and of the absolute, endless openness of this reality toward further growth in knowledge and perfection.

A very brief look at the argument of his work on *Justification and Reconciliation* will show that it is built on this framework.

Ritschl starts his discussion of these subjects from the idea of the inner intelligibility of the Christian life. The Christian knows that there can be no such thing as punishment for sin. Man senses in himself that sin is not such a thing as requires punishment. The Christian knows that the evils inflicted on him serve

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an educational purpose only.²⁴ Man needs moral and spiritual improvement. If we are to be true members of the kingdom of God, our guilt must be removed. But guilt is not incurred by breaking the law of God. There is no God who prescribes laws. All laws ultimately proceed from man. The laws pertaining to the world of fact—Kant’s phenomenal world—proceed from the *a priori* categories of man’s intellect. The laws pertaining to the world of value—Kant’s noumenal world—proceed from the *a priori* demands of human freedom. Man’s removal of guilt therefore cannot take place by any thing like the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. To have a truly “objective” basis for the removal of our guilt, we need a forgiveness that is built into the very idea of man’s freedom. “Guilt, in the moral sense, expresses the disturbance of the proper reciprocal relation between the moral law and freedom, which follows from the law transgressing abuse of freedom, and as such is marked by the accompanying pain of the feeling of guilt. Guilt is thus that permanent contradiction between the objective and the subjective fact or of the moral will which is produced by the abuse of freedom in non-fulfilment of the law, and the unworthiness of which is expressed for the moral subject, in his consciousness of guilt.”²⁵

The process of the interiorization and concomitantly the repression of the biblical narrative of man’s creation, fall and redemption through Christ could scarcely go much further than this.

²⁴ Albrecht Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, ed. H. R. Macintosh and A. B. Macaulay (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1900), p. 49.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 57–58.

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Ritschl seeks historic objectivity of Christ's work of redemption over against the subjectivism of Schleiermacher. But he, as well as Schleiermacher, is committed to an essentially Kantian view of what constitutes historical objectivity. For both historical objectivity must be, and can be, that and only that which is exhaustively intelligible to man by his conceptual manipulation; and which at the same expresses his ideal of absolute infinite spiritual growth.

It is the supposed unity of personality that requires this rejection of the Christ of the catechism. The false objectivity of the story of the catechism would, on Ritschl's view, destroy true objectivity of the primacy of the practical reason.

It is, therefore in terms of the free, supposedly unified autonomous personality of man, that Ritschl "demythologizes" the Scriptural story as a whole. It is man's self-understanding in terms of which a Christ without Myth is constructed. It is in terms of the categories of self-sufficient man that Ritschl identifies and expounds the meaning of his Christ.

This is not to follow the example of Luther and it is not to go back to the Bible. Ritschl's hermeneutical principle is not taken from the Scripture but from the Kantian *Critiques*. His appeal to the historical Christ as over against Schleiermacher is a movement that leads forward toward a still more consistent correlativism between faith and its "object" than is found in the father of modern theology. Kant gave Ritschl the hermeneutical key to the Scriptures. That key opened the idea that ultimate, purely contingent

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reality of which many can, in the nature of the case, know nothing, must be postulated as being love, pure, unconditional love. The historical Christ must be thought of as, for some reason, unknown to any one, least of all to himself, embodying that love of the “Father” in the world of history.²⁶

We are rapidly approaching the world of Barth and Bultmann, of Fuchs and Ebeling. The biblical idea of the covenantal relation between God and man is being turned upside down by modern theologians. Following the example of Adam modern theologians demythologize the voice, of God and reduce it to ventriloquism. Polman has helped us to see this fact.

F. New Directions in Hermeneutics (Karl Barth)

In his early works, says Polman, especially in his commentary on Romans, Karl Barth indicated the new direction theology would take under the spell of hermeneutics. There were four movements over against which Barth developed his new revelational approach in theology and therewith a new direction in hermeneutical methodology. There was orthodoxy which found its authority in the infallible words of Scripture. There was pietism which withdrew itself from the Word of God in a narrow realm of experience. There was the *Aufklärung* with its “historicism, ethicism and rationalism.” There was subjectivism which thought it could draw out final truth from the immediate self-consciousness of

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

man.”²⁷ These four movements vied with one another in suppressing the voice of the Word of God. Obviously, Barth argues, it is high time that the Word of God be heard anew.

God must be seen anew in his freedom, and in his sovereignty over man. Man must be confronted with the living God of the apostles, the prophets and the martyrs.

Man must become aware of God “as the impossible over against the possible, as death over against life, as eternity over against time.”²⁸ Only thus can man learn what he really is and what he really needs. Only thus, in understanding the real need of existence and at the same time the end of it in the new event in which the impossible becomes possible, does death become life and eternity become time.

Man cannot start from below and move toward the idea of this wholly other, this wholly unknown God, who remains hidden in his revelation. The revelation of this God must come exclusively from above. All the words which the church of God speaks, on the basis of revelation, are exclusively negative. God has indeed revealed himself in Christ, but of him we can only say that here we have the hidden point of contact between time and eternity, object and its origin; where man and God become visible. This being the case, nothing historical-psychological can, as such, be said to be

²⁷ Polman, “*In de Ban der Hermeneutik*,” p. 34.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

revelational. There is no revelational value to be found in the so-called historical Jesus.

What is needed is an absolute eschatologizing of theology. Says Barth: “Christianity that is not altogether and without residue identical with eschatology, has altogether and without residue nothing to do with Christ.”²⁹ Using Sören Kierkegaard’s statement with respect to the absolute qualitative opposition between time and eternity as his background Barth says that revelation is never continuous with the course of history. Revelation strikes into history in the way lightning strikes the earth. “God is in heaven but you are on earth,” says Barth and adds: “The relation of this God to this man, the relation of this man to this God is for me the theme of the Bible and, at the same time, the sum of philosophy.”³⁰

Nineteenth century theology did not observe the border between God and man. It did not observe the proper motto for man: Let God be God.

When he began the writing of his *Church Dogmatics* in 1932 Barth worked out his theology on the basis of this notion of the freedom of God. He sought to cut himself loose from every form of philosophy, even from existentialism. He was sure that his friends like Bultmann and Brunner were slipping back into the evil of nineteenth century consciousness-theology. Man cannot understand

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35. “*Christentum, das nicht ganz und gar und restlos Eschatologie ist, hat mit Christus ganz und gar und restlos nichts zu tun.*”

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 35–36.

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himself first and then, in terms of this self-understanding, analyze the nature of revelation. There is no “second task,” a task of making revelation intelligible to man for theology. The task of theology is only that of speaking forth the truth of the first commandment: “I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt have no other gods before me.”

G. The Existential-Kerygmatic Hermeneutic of Rudolph Bultmann

From Polman’s survey of Barth’s theology we turn to the main points he makes with respect to Bultmann.

(1) In the first place Bultmann’s method of existential interpretation is essentially the same as the “transcendental hermeneutical method of Kant, Schleiermacher and Ritschl.”³¹ Polman might have added Barth at this point.

In his practical application of this principle Bultmann uses the philosophy of Heidegger as expressed in his early work *Sein und Zeit*. In terms of this philosophy, Bultmann deals with (a) the question of understanding (b) the question of interpretation and (c) the question of *Geschichtlichkeit*.

(2) There can be no existential interpretation unless there be at the same time, demythologization.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

The whole procedure of interpretation involves the idea of the eschatologizing of the history of Scripture. “As a matter of fact in Paul history is absorbed into eschatology.” This is the case more definitely in the case of John, for whom the end of history as a reality of the future falls away. For him the end begins now, so that eschatology is realized in the present.

This is the message of the New Testament witnesses of faith in their existential interpretation of the Word-event, that is initiated, founded, authorized and legitimized in Jesus Christ. Naturally as men of their time they (these faith-witnesses) wrote about this in the objectivizing language of mythology, but he who would understand their real intention must explain this mythologically described whole as the great eschatological event. Bultmann describes this event as coming from beyond history, terminating it and compelling men to come to a decision of the last hour.³²

It appears than that the “great turning-point” that takes place with the advent of dialectical theology consists largely in the insistence that the narratives of Scripture must be completely eschatologized. Both Barth and Bultmann agree on this. To eschatologize the Scripture narrative, one must first demythologize without residue. There must be no directly ascertainable revelation of God in history anywhere, not even in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. But if there is to be no directly ascertainable revelation of God in

³² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

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“nature” and “history,” then there must be no God who exists independent of his relation to man above history. If we are to have a true view of revelation we must, with Barth, speak of the God of pure negation of whom nothing can be said either by way of affirmation or by way of negation. The God of pure negation is the God who is beyond the human distinction of affirmation and negation.

It is this God of pure negation who reveals himself and when he reveals himself at all he reveals himself wholly and without residue.

This God reveals himself and in revealing himself gives himself wholly in grace to mankind. Grace that is not universal grace is not grace at all. God is his revelation of grace to all men.

The real intention of Paul and especially of John is to bring out this fact: that neither they nor Jesus knew anything about God, yet they believed in this wholly unknown God as the God of love.

But to maintain the sovereign, as well as the universal presence, of this God of all-encompassing love and grace it must be held that in his revelation he is still wholly hidden.

It is thus that the principle of the exhaustive correlativity of pure rationalism and pure irrationalism of modern post-Kantian philosophy is applied to theology by the dialectical thought of Barth and Bultmann. Their turning away from the nineteenth century theology of consciousness toward the idea of a revelation that comes straight

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from above is, at bottom, merely a matter of emphasis. The idea of the wholly other is already inherent in Adam's program of eschatologizing. Adam was sure, instinctively sure, by some manner of *Wesensschau* that to get the real intent of the voice of God that came to him, he must demythologize it. To understand what God intends to tell me I must, said Adam, understand it exhaustively and to understand it exhaustively this revelation must express a God whose features come into existence with my understanding of them. God, that is, must be what he is, and be nothing but what he is in relation to my existential understanding of myself and the world.

Unfortunately, there is no other way of speaking of such a God than by means of mythological language. The real language of being, the real linguisticity of existence, is snowed under by the unavoidable necessity of speaking in objectivizing fashion about the ultimate subject of revelation.

Great deception has resulted. Even the Reformers did not seem to get the real intent in back of Paul's and John's God of universal love. Not till Kant did we have the equipment to really go to the depth of meaning of the god of pure negation turning paradoxically into pure affirmation of universal love. It was especially the traditional orthodox theologians, living exclusively on the surface of objectifying thought, who obstructed the progress toward a true gospel of universal love accomplished in and being accomplished through all men in the Christ-Event.

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With the Copernican revolution of Kant, we now possess the tools for getting at the real intent of this revelation, this universal presence of the sovereign grace of God. But it was not till another revolution, the revolution inaugurated by Barth and developed by Bultmann and others, that the full significance of Adam's revolution (with all its benediction) was beginning to be appreciated. Now, at last, the supposed claims of a self-existing God are shown to be hollow. We have now eschatologized history completely; there will now be no God and no Christ standing at the top of the escalator of our lives. We now know that history is *Lichtungsgeschichte* and that we are what we are as participant in it.

But, you object, you are in all this ignoring the difference between Barth and Bultmann. Did not Barth warn Bultmann that his program of demythologization and existential interpretation would involve the idea of the parthenogenesis of the faith? Did not Barth insist that the resurrection is a real event and as such alone can be the basis of Christian faith? All this is true but it is important to note that when Barth wants an "objective" factual basis back of resurrection faith he did not, for one minute, fall back on the "objectifying" procedure of orthodoxy. When the gospels lead us on from the passion narratives to the resurrection event, they lead us into an area of history of a different sort (*in einem Geschichtsbereich anderer, eigener Art*).³³ There is, to be sure, a temporal togetherness that envelops the death and resurrection of Christ. But this temporal togetherness is found in the fact of

³³ Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* 4 (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1953), p. 369.

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the Christ-Event as *Geschichte*. Christ's travelling from Jordan to Golgatha is both God's eternal being and the being of our time each day. We must, says Barth, actualize the incarnation. When Barth actualizes the incarnation, the result is the same as when Bultmann demythologizes it. For Barth the steps of the exaltation do not follow calendar-wise upon the steps of his humiliation. To say that they did would be to remain bound by the coils of orthodox mythology. Only in the concept of the *Christ-Event* as *Geschichte* do we have both the absolute eternity of God and the absolute temporality of man united.

On this point Barth and Brunner are basically in agreement. Barth's *Christ-Event* is, to all intents and purposes, the same as Bultmann's conception of the paradoxical identity of history and eschatology in Jesus Christ. Bultmann accomplishes by means of demythologizing and by existential interpretation what Barth accomplishes by means of his actualization of the incarnation.

What they do is, in each case, accomplished by the more consistent application of what Polman calls the transcendental hermeneutical method of Kant, of Schleiermacher and of Ritschl.

Naturally the only way such men as Fuchs and Ebeling can go beyond Barth and Bultmann is to seek to apply the Kantian principle still more consistently. They may claim the whole of theology for their province; indeed they do this because they must claim the whole of reality for their province. Though others may differ from them the difference

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or differences between them will be limited to variations of emphasis. They will agree negatively on demythologizing the historic Protestant position. They will agree positively in constructing a theology on the transcendental hermeneutical principles of Adam, of Socrates and of Kant. After that they may go on different paths. Barth and Bultmann differ on the application of Kant's method. Theologians after these men go beyond Bultmann and/or beyond Barth. Fuchs and Ebeling go beyond Bultmann. They even revolutionize his approach. Bultmann would interpret the text by starting from the subject; Fuchs and Ebeling would turn this procedure about by interpreting man, starting from the text. Instead of attaching themselves to the earlier Heidegger as Bultmann did, they would attach themselves to the later Heidegger. In a similar fashion Heinrich Ott, the disciple of Barth, attaches himself to the later Heidegger in order to give philosophical support to Barth's theology. Several of the younger theologians would broaden or deepen the hermeneutical method involved in the theology of Barth and Bultmann by relating it to recent philosophical schools of thought.

Polman brings into the picture of modern hermeneutic: (1) the personalistic existential philosophy of Gogarten, of Ferdinand Ebner and of Martin Buber, (2) the correlation-theology of Paul Tillich, and (3) the "God is Dead" theology, as well as (4) the language theology of Ebeling and Fuchs. We refer only, and that briefly, to what he says of Fuchs and Ebeling.

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In the first place there is, says Polman, in the thinking of Ebeling and Fuchs, the completest possible rejection of all objectifying forms of thought and that on the basis of an existential principle of hermeneutic. So far they follow Bultmann. Fuchs wants even to be more radical than Bultmann on this score. His attempt to be more radical than Bultmann is based upon his appeal to the later Heidegger. Heidegger's *Umkehr*, discussed earlier, implies the vision of the linguisticality of Being. As a result it now appears that "the deepest essence of man does not consist of his questionableness (*Fraglichkeit*) but in linguisticality (*Sprachlichkeit*)."³⁴

H. The Linguisticality of Existence

By this *Sprachlichkeit* of existence we must not think of speech, that gives information about the surface-realities of the space-time world. *Sprachlichkeit* means person to person "participation and communication." On this level speech is not merely a premise of intellectual knowing but rather "a result of a way of existence." Paul had this vision of speech as person to person communication when he brought the gospel of "the new existence under God's grace and love ..." In terms of this gospel men participate in the hope of God's future. "Jesus, too, was concerned with this future, this government of God. He made himself the example of this hope. He did not realize himself, but is realized as an exemplifying basic image for all who hope. This is seen most clearly in the gospel of John. Here, it is clear as day, that he calls men to

³⁴Polman, "*In de Ban der Hermeneutik*," p. 72.

existence in love, because he himself is nothing other than existence in love unto the death of the cross. His love commands our love as the result of his existing, in order that we should thus possess life not in ourselves but in God, that is, in love.”³⁵

It is in this way, says Polman, that Fuchs would be more radical than Bultmann. Fuchs thinks he does better justice to the significance of Jesus than did Bultmann. In Jesus the way and the movement of love become manifest and in Jesus’ communication with us we are shown to have the possibility of the life of love and hope in the future of God. On this view it is we ourselves who must first be demythologized in so far as we are not enveloped in the life of love exemplified in Jesus.

It is therefore not we who must demythologize the text of the New Testament; on the contrary it is the text that must demythologize us. To be sure there is much in Scripture that does not deal with the essence of the gospel, the gospel of love. But insofar as the New Testament is itself taken up into the process of love, it serves as the standard and criterion for us. The text calls us to live the life of love. When it does, the language event in which the text is rooted, comes out afresh in the present and calls upon us to make responsible speech. The text was born of hearing the gospel of love. “And this repeats itself in all true confrontation with this language and text in the present.” “Thus hermeneutic in theology is nothing other than teaching about the speech of faith, (*spraakleer van*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

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het geloof) while the New Testament is the hermeneutical textbook employed while existential interpretation serves the purpose of turning the proclamation of the past into a proclamation in the present in a scientifically responsible manner.”³⁶

I. A New Quest of the Historical Jesus

3

Of special interest to us, in the present connection, is the relation of the theology of the New Hermeneutic to the theology of those who are engaged in “A New Quest of the Historical Jesus.” In discussing this New Quest Robinson first establishes the impossibility and illegitimacy of the Original Quest. For the men of the original quest, the term “historical” was used in the sense of “things in the past which have been established by objective scholarship.” “Consequently the expression ‘historical Jesus’ came to man: ‘What can be known of Jesus of Nazareth by means of the methods of the historian.’”³⁷ The nineteenth century applied the method of objectification to the study of Jesus of Nazareth. They held to the method of “objective positivistic historiography.”³⁸

Twentieth century theologians developed a methodology that reached to a deeper level of reality than the old questers were able to reach. The

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

³⁷ Van Til, C. (1974). *The New Hermeneutic*. The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company: Phillipsburg, NJ.

³⁷ James M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (Naperville, Illinois: Alec R. Allenson Inc., 1959), p. 26.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 35.



“nineteenth century historical method had failed to penetrate the depths at which the reality of history lies ...” The new method is based particularly on the idea of “the basic historicity of the self.” “The problem of the historian’s own historicity has become a fundamental problem.” Now when we add to this the assumption that the historians’ subject matter is God, the impossibility of the situation is more than obvious.” The “whole Ritschlian attempt to prove Christianity historically suddenly became absurd.”³⁹

But now, argues Robinson, “history is increasingly understood as essentially the unique and the creative, whose reality would not be apart from the event in which it becomes, and whose truth could not be known by Platonic recollection or inference from rational principle, but only through historical encounter. History is the act of intention, the commitment, the meaning for the participants, behind the external occurrence. In such intention and commitment the self of the participant actualizes itself, and in this act of self-actualization the self is revealed. Hence it is the task of modern historiography to grasp such acts of intention, such commitments, such meaning, such self-actualization; and it is the task of modern biography to lay hold of the self-hood which is therein revealed.”⁴⁰

We now proceed to follow the new questers in their search for Jesus. They do not follow the objectifying historiography of the old questers. Yet,

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 30–31.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 67–68.

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they do not want to eschatologize history without residue in the way Barth and Bultmann did, in their reaction to the old questers. In that case the *kerygma* has really no more contact with us men. Some method must be found whereby we may, with Barth and Bultmann, escape the complete relativization of the *kerygma* of nineteenth century historicism while yet finding reality in ordinary history. We must somehow bring about a more and more intelligible relation between *Historie* and *Geschichte* than Barth and Bultmann were able to offer. Fortunately the new quest has the tools with which to accomplish this formerly impossible task. Working “in terms of the modern view of history and the self” provided by such men as Martin Heidegger and R. G. Collingwood, this hermeneutic is now equal to this task.⁴¹

J. R. G. Collingwood on History

How is “Jesus’ understanding of his existence, his selfhood, and thus, in the higher sense, his life a possible subject of historical research?”⁴² This is possible because genuine historical research enables us to meet Jesus on the deeper level of reality in which he lived, moved and had his being. We need no longer be concerned about the difference between disciples at first hand and disciples at second hand. We and all men with us, are disciples in daily “historical encounter” with Jesus. Such men as Heidegger and Collingwood have built the idea of our personal, our existential, encounter with Jesus right into the idea of the

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 72.

historic nature of the self and his world. History is the reality of God in Christ as present to every man. This is what Barth and Bultmann should have meant by the idea of the Christ-Event. Well, they really meant this but because of their extreme eschatologism they were not able to say it well. The nineteenth century men, like Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Harnack and Herrmann also really meant the same thing but because of their failure to see history eschatologically, they too were not able to express it well. All of us are really agreed because all of us are seeking to apply Kant's transcendental hermeneutical principles of interpretation to all of reality. Kant's idea of the autonomy of the self naturally led to our twentieth century notion of the historicness of the self. Besides, Kant's notion of the transcendental unity of apperception led to our notion of the Event or Act character of all reality. The only persons who will not agree on this are the old-fashioned creedal theologians. But even among these we must differentiate. The Roman Catholics and the Arminians have enough of our idea of the correlativity of pure rationality and pure contingency in their theology as to make it really hard for them to refuse to join us.

Looking at the activity of the New Questers we see how similar their effort is to that of the men of the new hermeneutic. This is particularly the case with respect to the place of Jesus in theology. Robinson is quite right in relating the approach of the New Questors to the place of Jesus closely to that of the New Hermeneutic. There is in both movements the same effort to present a more balanced notion of the idea of the Christ-Event than

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was given by Barth and Bultmann. Both movements hold that Barth and Bultmann overemphasized the eschatologization of history. Both movements seek to overcome this imbalance on the part of Barth not by returning to the nineteenth century Jesus of history but by discovering a Jesus of history in whom the ideal of the perfect correlativity of pure rationality and pure contingency is more fully exemplified than in any other man.

Robinson points out that “Kasemann’s initial proposal of a new quest” found a parallel in the effort of Fuchs.⁴³ He adds: “The initiative of Kasemann and Fuchs in proposing a new quest of the historical Jesus has produced its first tangible results in the appearance of 1956 of Gunther Bornkamm’s monograph *Jesus von Nazareth*.” The men of the new hermeneutic and the men of the new quest “express the newly awakened concern for the message and the conduct of Jesus in their relation to the *kerygma*.”⁴⁴ Both movements seek to do away with the dualism between history and eschatology by finding “eschatology in history.”⁴⁵

In his work on *History and Hermeneutics* Braaten also deals with the New Hermeneutics and with the New Quest. We note briefly what he says about Fuchs and more fully what he says about Ebeling.

K. New Directions in Theology

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

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Braaten tells us that Fuchs and Ebeling, more than Kasemann and Bornkamm, “have attached their inquiry into the historical Jesus to a specific theological program. Together they have worked out a hermeneutical theory that hinges upon the concepts of language and faith. The key to the continuity between the historical Jesus and the kerygmatic Christ is a word-event. They are not interested in a factual, biographical account of the life of Jesus. Rather, they seek what came to expression in him. Ebeling uses the term *Wortgeschehen* (word-event) and Fuchs prefers *Sprachereignis* (language occurrence). For both of them, what uniquely came to expression in Jesus was faith. To believe in Jesus means to reenact to the decision of faith which Jesus originally made. Faith is not a partial act; it is the whole man in openness to the future, living in relation to other men and sharing in the love of God.”⁴⁶

Ebeling calls Jesus “the witness to faith, or the witness of faith. He can also be called the source of faith and the basis of faith. But, he is not the object of faith. ‘Faith in Jesus’ as a combination of terms is shorthand for attaining a pure trust in the love of God. Today it is necessary to go behind the Christological ideas of the primitive church to an encounter with Jesus himself. Christology is secondary, the faith of Jesus primary.”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Carl E. Braaten, “History and Hermeneutics.” *New Directions in Theology Today*, ed. William Horden, 7 volumes (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 2:71.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

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At this point Braaten connects the new hermeneutic and the new quest by saying that it is precisely through his hermeneutic that Ebeling has made a contribution to the new quest. Both the new hermeneutic and the new quest seek a Jesus whose faith in God may help us to have faith in God, that is trust in the love of God. If this may be called Christology then this is the new Christology which must replace that of Chalcedon.

We said earlier that Fuchs and Ebeling seek a Christ event in which both history and eschatology are given their due. On this central point they seek to go beyond Bultmann and Barth. Ebeling “criticizes Bultmann’s theology for failing to grasp the continuity between the *kerygma* and the historical Jesus ...” The “earthly Jesus is not optional content for Christian faith.” He “is not satisfied to have a Christological *kerygma* that has no explicit foundation in the historical Jesus.”⁴⁸

There is, of course, neither on the part of the new questers, nor on the part of the men of the new hermeneutic, any desire to go back to the Jesus Christ of traditional Christology. Far from it. On the other hand the question may well be asked, says Braaten, whether Ebeling is not “warming over Herrmann’s theology.” He asks this especially with respect to Ebeling’s view of the resurrection. “Faith (*fides qua creditur*) and the object of faith (*fides quae creditur*) seem to coalesce in such a way that faith loses its status of being radically dependent upon the risen Lord.” In support of his claim Braaten

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

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quotes Ebeling's words: "The appearance of Jesus and the coming to faith of the man who is granted the appearance ... are one and the same thing.... It was not a case of a single addition *credendum* (the fact of the resurrection), but of faith itself—and that, too, in relation to Jesus as the source of faith." Of the appearances of Jesus after the resurrection Ebeling says: "It is not in the appearances as such, but in faith, that their witness is grounded."⁴⁹ In criticism of this Braaten says: "Ebeling's writings generally celebrate the importance of faith, but we miss in them a large vision of the history of salvation on which the hope of faith lives. At least it appears doubtful to us that the *kerygma*—which Bultmann left suspended in the air—can adequately regain its foundations in history by going around the resurrection back to the historical Jesus."⁵⁰

Before concluding this section a few words must be added about the current movement in theology that centers about the idea of Revelation as History. "The battlecry" (of this movement) "is that the *kerygma* without history is a meaningless noise. The preaching of the 'Word of God' is an empty assertion if it is severed from what really happened in history."⁵¹ But if the battle-cry is to have any meaning, argues Wolfhart Pannenberg, we must show "how revelation and history are connected."⁵²

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 27.

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Here we have, says Braaten, the question of “the epistemology of historical revelation,” and this “has become the axial point in modern debate.”⁵³

L. New Frontiers in Theology (Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jurgen Moltmann)

Well, we have already seen, that this is the pivotal problem both for the new quest and for the new hermeneutic. In all three movements the effort is made to improve on Barth and Bultmann’s position by doing greater justice to ordinary history than these men did, while at the same time not falling back into orthodoxy. All three movements want to retain “the dimensions of transcendence in reality.”⁵⁴ By this dimension of transcendence is meant, of course, the idea of pure contingency involved in Kantian epistemology.

James Robinson discusses the relation of the theology of history in its attempt to correct and go beyond Barth and Brunner in his book, *Theology as History*. Robinson quotes Bultmann as saying: the “relationship between history (as world history) and the event of revelation is a dialectical one, that is to say, the Christian faith asserts the paradox that a purely historical event is, at one and the same time, an eschatological event. With this assertion we include the statement that the event of revelation must at the same time be proclaimed as an historical

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

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event. Otherwise we could surrender the paradox.”⁵⁵

It would seem that Bultmann has already done justice to history. What can Pannenberg want to add to the idea that revelation while eschatological, must always be presented as historical event, an event of world-history?

Well, says Robinson: “What Pannenberg is seeking to do is to carry through in a way somewhat analogous to Whitehead the replacement of static ontological categories by those for which history provides the model. ‘The historic process as such has become the bearer of meaning’?”

If any one hearing this fears that then all reality is reduced to pure flux, he need not fear. Pannenberg does not want a deterministically conceived universal. But this does not mean that he is throwing overboard every form of universality. He wants a universality that is fully correlative to pure contingency.⁵⁶⁵⁷

To unite pure contingency and pure universality he assumes a “common base” for them. Man does not have such a base in himself. “Hence a transcendent ground in God is to be inferred by rational argumentation, as an *a posteriori* confirmation of the Old Testament understanding of

⁵⁵ James M. Robinson, “Theology as History,” *New Frontiers in Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 3:26.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27. [The exact location of this footnote is unclear from original text.—ed.]

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29–30. The exact location of this footnote is unclear from original text.—ed.

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history.... Now, in the nature of the case, if we are to have knowledge of universal, contingent history, we must hold that “the role of Jesus’ resurrection” is the “proleptic anticipation of that end of history ...” This removes the resurrection from being “just a particular and makes of it the key for attaining a universal grasp of history before the end comes. Thus the historical proof of the resurrection can serve as a materially decisive model for Pannenberg’s procedure, as an alternative to Bultmann’s access to the resurrection in the existential encounter with the historic witness of the church.”⁵⁸

“This materially decisive instance of the relation of historiography to theology is the model for the general approach to the perennial problem of ‘faith and history.’ ”⁵⁹

It is in this manner that Pannenberg would cure the imbalance of the Barth-Bultmann view of the relation of faith to history. It appears that Pannenberg’s cure for this imbalance is, again, essentially the same as that of the new quest and of the new hermeneutic. The cure is in each instance effected by stressing the need for a perfect balance between history and eschatology. Barth and Bultmann were right in stressing eschatology over against history but they went too far. If we are to have faith by which we have contact with the dimension of transcendence and a reason that does not require a *sacrificium intellectus* we need to postulate the identity of both in the paradoxical

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

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identity between the two in the Christ-Event. It is in terms of this Christ-Event that we must seek our own authentic selves. Then and only then do we have true intellectual self-understanding and moral motivation to face the future. Then that future is the future of God. Then the theology of our future as participation in the future of God supplements Heidegger's idea of *Lichtungsgeschichte*. Then Christ as the great *Sprachereignis*, whose faith we follow by also speaking of the love of God, supplements Heidegger's idea that we must be loudspeakers for the silent toll of being.

So far we have been concerned chiefly with a description of the new hermeneutic. Polman has helped us to deepen this description by going back to Schleiermacher and Kant. The new hermeneutic, says Polman, must be traced back to the broad epistemological principles of Kant. It is quite impossible to do justice to the new hermeneutic unless it be seen as the theological apex of modern philosophical hermeneutics and epistemology in general.

We have also already begun to intimate that, because all this is true, a Christian apologetic that is to evaluate the new hermeneutic must do so in the light of its own comprehensive view of the self and of its principles of unity and diversity. The all-inclusive Christ-Event of Reformed Protestantism must be set over against modern epistemology in general.

Before going on with such an apologetic effort we may sum up the total picture of modern

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hermeneutical theory in general by looking into Hans George Gadamer's work on *Truth and Method*.

M. Hans George Gadamer (Wahrheit Und Methode)

Basic to Gadamer's work is once again the idea of the historicness of the self and of the world of the self.

To see what this means Gadamer gives us a survey of the thinking that developed into this notion of the historicness of the self; he then works out the implications of this idea in a broad comprehensive analysis of human experience as a whole.

Gadamer leads us through a detailed analysis of Kant's philosophy aesthetics as a background for understanding the recent hermeneutical notion of the historicness of man's self-understanding.

Having done this Gadamer is interested in tracing "the development of hermeneutical method in recent times as this issues in the emergence of the historical consciousness."⁶⁰

We note in particular what Gadamer says about Wilhelm Dilthey whose work (which deals with the critique of historical reason) is noted in Ebeling's article. The whole purpose of modern hermeneutics, argues Gadamer, is to be critical in Kant's sense of the term, i.e., of looking into the

⁶⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1965), p. 162.

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presuppositions underlying any procedure of interpretation. But Kant was not fully true to his own principles. He retained the idea of certain self-existing entities beyond human experience as possibly having some influence upon that experience. Dilthey did not really get very far beyond Kant on this point. He did, to be sure, seek to liberate hermeneutics from its subordination to dogmatical teaching. What Dilthey did not see, however, is that to be really critical man must be liberated not merely from the chains of dogma, but the very nature of dogma must be changed.⁶¹

Only by thus going beyond Dilthey in our application of a truly critical epistemology can we really appreciate the significance of Schleiermacher's hermeneutic.⁶² It then appears that Schleiermacher points forward to a notion of universality and of individuality that does justice both to the idea of the sovereignty and that of the universality of grace as we today understand them.⁶³ In seeking for a theory of historic reason Dilthey committed himself in advance to a dualism between philosophy and experience that he was not able to overcome.⁶⁴

It is not till we come to Heidegger that a truly critical notion of the historical consciousness appears upon the scene. In Heidegger the "philosophical intention of Dilthey" is set free. Others made their contributions but it was Heidegger who brought into the light of day the really radical

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 177 ff.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

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requirement of change in thought-activity involved in the rejection of the substance idea.⁶⁵

Heidegger attached himself to Husserl's phenomenology. It was by means of Husserl's notion of intentionality that Heidegger undertook a critique of various forms of "objectivism," even that of Dilthey. By means of the intentional phenomenology of Husserl, Heidegger accomplishes a new Copernican revolution of self-understanding. This self-understanding includes understanding of all reality. "The universality of absolute spirit envelops all being in absolute historicity, in which nature is subordinated as a product of spirit."⁶⁶

Verstehen and Geschichtlichkeit

With this background, argues Gadamer, we realize what is meant by the "historicity of understanding" (*Geschichtlichkeit des Verstehens*).⁶⁷

Moreover, when we understand the historicity of understanding we understand at the same time the "logic of question and answer."⁶⁸ When a text that has come down to us by tradition becomes the object of interpretation for as this implies already that it puts a question to the interpreter. To understand a text means to understand this question. And this takes place only, as we said, because of the fact one attains the hermeneutical

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 351.

horizon. This we recognize now as the horizon of questions (*Fragehorizont*) within which the direction of meaning of the text is determined.⁶⁹

He who would understand must therefore penetrate behind what the text says since “One understands a text in its meaning only if one obtains the horizon of questioning, which as such of necessity also allows for a diversity of answers.”⁷⁰

For English readers it is of interest to note that at this precise point Gadamer attaches himself to R. G. Collingwood. Gadamer says that Collingwood’s “logic of question and answer” as developed in his *An Autobiography* is very similar to his own.⁷¹ We have noted already how frequently writers on hermeneutics point out that it is Collingwood’s work on *The Idea of History* that has given them great assistance in their formulation of a hermeneutics based on the historicness of the self. Collingwood thinks that the modern historian should follow Vico, the Italian philosopher, in holding the *verum et factum convertuntur*. Says he: “The fabric of human society is created by man out of nothing, and every detail of this fabric is therefore a human *factum*, eminently knowable to the human mind as such.”⁷² Involved in Kant’s idea of an inward teleology is the notion that the mind must both be itself and know itself. This can be attained only if “reality consists neither of isolated particulars nor of

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ R. G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 30–31.

⁷² R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 65.

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abstract universals but of individual facts whose being is historical.” “A reality, so defined can be only the life of the mind itself, that is, history.”⁷³ There must be no “body of things whose proper name is nature” placed outside the mind. It is only thus that “the facts of history are present facts. This historical past is the world of ideas which the present evidence creates in the present. In historical inference we do not move from our present world to a past world; the movement in experience is always a movement within a present world of ideas. The paradoxical result is that the historical past is not past at all; it is present. It is not a past surviving into a present; it must be the present. But it is not the present as such, the merely contemporary. It is present; because all experience, whatever is present.”⁷⁴ “Chronicle, then is the past as merely believed upon testimony, but not historically known.”⁷⁵ Chronicle may be said to deal with the “outside of an event.” These are “mere events.” But the historian seeks for the “unity of the outside and inside of an event.” And such unity is action.⁷⁶ “Unlike the natural scientist, the historian is not concerned with event as such at all. He is only concerned with those events which are the outward expression of thoughts, and is only concerned with these insofar as they express thoughts.”⁷⁷ “To the historian the activities whose history he is studying are not spectacles to be watched, but experiences to be lived through in his mind; they are objective, or

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

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known to him, only because they are also subjective, or activities of his own.”⁷⁸

Collingwood thinks that a Copernican revolution has thus been accomplished in modern times in this new manner of regarding history. So far “from relying on an authority other than himself, to whose statements his thoughts must conform, the historian is his own authority and his thought autonomous, self-authoring, possessed of a criterion to which his so-called authorities must conform and by reference to which they are criticized.”⁷⁹ The historian “has it in his power to reject something explicitly told him by his authorities and to substitute something else. If that is possible, the criterion of historical truth cannot be the fact that a statement is made by an authority. It is the truthfulness and the information of the so-called authority that are in question; and this question the historian has to answer for himself, on his own authority. Even if he accepts what his authorities tell him, therefore, he accepts it not on their authority but on his own; not because they say it, but because it satisfied his criterion of historical truth. For the historian there can never be authorities, because the so-called authorities abide a verdict which only he can give.”⁸⁰ “There is nothing other than historical thought itself, by appeal to which its conclusions may be verified.”⁸¹ “All that the historian means, when he describes certain historical facts as data, is that for the purposes of a particular piece of work there are certain historical

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

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problems relevant to that work which for the present he proposes to treat as settled; though, if they are settled, it is only because historical thinking has settled them in the past, and they remain settled only until he or someone else decides to reopen them.”⁸² “It is thus the historian’s picture of the past, the product of his own *a priori* imagination, that has to justify the sources used in its construction.” “Freed from its dependence on fixed points supplied from without, the historian’s picture of the past is thus in every detail an imaginary picture, and its necessity is at every point the necessity of the *a priori* imagination. Whatever goes into it, goes into it not because his imagination passively accepts it, but because it actively demands it.”⁸³

If the reader should think that on such a basis there is little or no difference between the writing of novels and the writing of history, Collingwood assures us that there is. He gives the following criteria by which to distinguish between them. (1) History must be localized in space and time, which the novels need not. (2) All history must be consistent with itself. The purely imaginary world such as novels tend to offer, need not. There is but one historical world “and everything in it must stand in some relation to everything else, even if that relation is only topographical and chronological.” (3) Thirdly, and most importantly, the historian’s picture stands in a peculiar relation to something called evidence. Whether a historical statement is true is determined by an appeal to evidence. And what is evidence? In accord with what has been said before,

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 244.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

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Collingwood answers this by saying first that: “it is not ready-made historical knowledge, to be swallowed and regurgitated by the historian’s mind. Everything is evidence which the historian can use as evidence.... Evidence is evidence only when someone contemplates it historically. Otherwise it is merely perceived fact, historically dumb.”⁸⁴

When the historian approaches his task in this manner, his picture of the past, however fragmentary and faulty, is governed by an idea which is “clear, rational and universal.” “It is the idea of the historical imagination as a self-dependent, self-determining, and self-justifying form of thought.”⁸⁵

Suppose now that the method of Collingwood be applied to the New Testament and to the Christ who speaks through it. Here are the records. Here are statements made by those who say they were apostles of Jesus of Nazareth. What would Collingwood do with them? His answer may be expected from what we have heard him say. Summarized in his own words it is something like this: “Confronted with a ready-made statement about the subject he is studying, the scientific historian never asks himself: ‘Is this statement true or false,’ in other words, ‘Shall I incorporate it in my history of that subject or not?’ The question he asks himself is: ‘What does this statement mean?’ And this is not equivalent to the question, ‘What did the person who made it mean by it?’ although that is

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 246–247.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

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doubtless a question that the historian must ask, and must be able to answer.”⁸⁶

Applying this to the gospels, Collingwood would wish, perhaps, to find out what Jesus said and what the apostles said. But even if he could find out the exact borderline between what the apostles said and what Jesus said, he would not simply rest with the statement of Jesus. He would seek then to determine what Jesus meant by what he said. But even that would not be the end of the matter. No statement that would shine out clearly as the words of Jesus would be for him a final authority. For “the scientific historian does not treat statements as statements but as evidence: not as true or false accounts of the facts of which they profess to be accounts, but as other facts which, if he knows the right questions to ask about them, may throw light on those facts.”⁸⁷

It must now be apparent that Collingwood’s position is a very consistent expression of the non-Christian philosophy of history. The great virtue of Collingwood’s view is that it so plainly rests on the autonomy of man. When he speaks of the autonomy of the historical method he speaks, of course, in opposition to the idea that the historian should narrowly follow the method of the scientist. But more basically he is opposing the idea that the historian should be required to submit to any statement, even in his own field, as authoritative. The rights of the historian are infringed upon if he is required to take any statement at face value, as

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 275.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

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being a true account of the facts that have taken place.

This excursion into Collingwood ought to help us in understanding the existential approach of German hermeneutics so well set forth by Gadamer. Gadamer in German-language thinking and Collingwood in English-language thinking stand together in assuming the ultimate self-sufficiency of man as his own final source and criterion for meaningful linguistic expression. Modern theological hermeneutics seeks to apply the principles of general hermeneutics of such men as Gadamer and Collingwood to the question of the “historic Jesus.” This historic Jesus is constructed by the hermeneutical principles of the internally self-sufficient man. Jesus must be that which aids him in his attempt to find authentic self-existence. Reality must be of such a nature as to furnish Jesus with an infinite supply of grace with which man can develop his authentic self.

A logic of question and answer such as Collingwood develops, does not, says Gadamer, go beyond history in order to understand history. “A standpoint outside history from which as a point of vantage the identity of a problem in the course of its answering effort, is in truth, not to be found.”⁸⁸

In fact not only do answers to problems change; the problems themselves also change. It is therefore always a hermeneutical necessity to go beyond mere reconstruction of the past.⁸⁹ If we are to escape

⁸⁸ Gadamer, *Warheit und Methode*, p. 357.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 356.

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abstraction we must give a dialectical significance to the problem idea.

The dialectic of question and answer which we discover in our hermeneutical experience enables us to determine the nature of our "*Wirkungsgeschichtliche Bewusstsein*" Understanding is a matter of interaction that is similar to a conversation. We must make our environment speak to us so that we merge with it and so that it merges with us.⁹⁰

Every form of written text that comes to us is a sort of speech estranged from itself. As such it requires a turning back *Ruckverwandlung* of its signs into speech and meaning."⁹¹

Herewith we are, as it were anew, approaching the Greek point of view. For the Greeks the "inner unity of Word and fact" (*Sache*) is assumed.⁹² But in the case of the Greeks dialogue tended to lose itself in the self-meditation of the Absolute.

It was in Christianity with its conception of the incarnation that philosophical thought received a new dimension." "Inasmuch as the Word became flesh and in this incarnation for the first time the reality of Spirituality completes itself, it follows that the Logos is liberated from its spirituality which at the same time signified its cosmic potentiality." (*Wenn das Wort Fleisch wird und erst in dieser Inkarnation die Wirklichkeit des Geistes sich*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 359.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 371.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 383.

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vollendet, so wird damit der Logos aus seiner Spiritualität, die zugleich seine kosmische Potentialität bedeutet, befreit.)⁹³ Herewith we have reached the idea that the Word is pure event. And herewith we have gone beyond the Greeks.

Herewith too, human speech, is made the object of intelligent reflection. True, this is only indirectly so. The unity of the Father and the Son is beyond human understanding. But the point of importance is that the mystery of this unity is now seen to have its reflection in the phenomenon of speech.⁹⁴

N. Dietrich Bonhoeffer

In his little book *Christ the Center* Dietrich Bonhoeffer expresses the theology of the new hermeneutic, the theology as history, and the theology of the new quest admirably when he says: "To speak of Christ means to keep silent; to be silent about Christ means to speak. The proclamation of Christ is the church speaking from a proper silence."⁹⁵ "There is no point in the life of Jesus to which one could point and say clearly, 'Jesus here was indubitably the Son of God,' 'Jesus here can clearly be recognized from one of his works,' 'The incognito of the incarnation makes it doubly impossible to recognize the person from his works.' 1. Jesus is man and it is an ambiguous procedure to infer the person from his work. 2. Jesus is God and it is impossible to argue directly from history to

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 396.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 27.

God.”⁹⁶ In his thinking Bonhoeffer seeks to carry out the principle that in Christ God is wholly revealed and wholly hidden in his revelation.

It is by thinking of Christ in this fashion that we can go beyond the theology of such men as Schleiermacher, Ritschl and Herrmann, and even Barth. They understood Christ as a power, not as “personal.” Sometimes they speak of the personality of Jesus and do not speak of him as a person. “God is God in the man Jesus. In this Jesus Christ God is present. This one God-man is the starting point of Christology.”⁹⁷ This Christ is *pro me*. “That Christ is *pro me* is not an historical or an ontical statement, but an ontological one. That is, Christ can never be thought of in his being himself, but only in his relationship to me. That in turn means that Christ can only be conceived of existentially viz., in the community.”⁹⁸

Summing up his view of Christ as the Center Bonhoeffer says: “This *pro me* structure means three things for the relationship of Christ to the new humanity:

1. Jesus Christ *pro me* is pioneer, head and first-born of the brethren who follow him. This *pro me* structure is thus related to the historicity of Jesus. He is *pro me* as pioneer for the others.

2. Jesus Christ is for his brethren by standing in their place. Christ stands for his new humanity

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

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before God. But if that is the case, he is the new humanity. He stands vicariously where mankind should stand, by virtue of his *pro me* structure. Not only does he act for it, he is it, by going to the cross, bearing sin, and dying. So mankind is crucified, dies, and is judged in him.

3. Because he acts as the new humanity, it is in him and he is in it. Because the new humanity is in him, God is gracious toward it in him. This one, whole, person, the God-man Jesus Christ, is present in the church in his *pro me* structure as Word, as sacrament and as community.”⁹⁹

It is Christ in his *pro me* structure who “becomes the address of forgiveness and of address.” And “Christ’s presence is his existence as preaching. Were that not so, preaching could not have the prominent place accorded to it by the Reformation.”¹⁰⁰

In our preaching we must speak of Christ as the centre of history, as well as the centre of our existence. As such he is absolute. But he is not absolute as an historical appearance. “Comparisons with relative entities and proofs with relative questions do not result in an absolute. The question of the absolute is liberal and rational: it distorts the question intended here.”¹⁰¹ Christ is the “hidden centre” of history. “The meaning of history is swallowed up by an event which takes place in the depth and secrecy of a man who is

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 48–49.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

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crucified.”¹⁰² “Christ stands where history as a whole should stand before God. He is the *pro me* even for history. He is even the mediator of history. Since Christ is present in the church after the cross and the resurrection, this church too, must be understood as the centre of history.” The church is “the hidden meaning and promise of the state.” Finally, nature, though it “is not reconciled, like man and history” “it is redeemed for a new freedom.” Nature “has no freedom.” Therefore it is not reconciled. But it finds “its redemption in Christ as its centre.”¹⁰³

“To sum up,” says Bonhoeffer, “we must continue to stress that Christ is indeed the centre of existence, the centre of history and now, too, the centre of nature; but these three aspects can be distinguished only in the abstract. In fact human existence is always history, always nature as well. As fulfiller of the law and liberator of creation, the mediator acts for the whole of human existence. He is the same, who is intercessor and *pro me*, and who is himself the end of the old world and the beginning of the new world of God.”¹⁰⁴

It remains only to single out more specifically the place Bonhoeffer ascribes to the historical Jesus of Nazareth. Says Bonhoeffer: “present historical (*geschichtliche*) Christ is the same person as the historical (*historische*) Jesus of Nazareth.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

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Are we not herewith drawn into the uncertainties of history? “As a subject for historical investigation, Jesus Christ remains an uncertain phenomenon; his historicity can neither be affirmed or denied with absolute certainty.” Thus “absolute certainty about an historical fact can never be acquired by itself. It remains a paradox. Nevertheless it is constitutive for the church. That means that for the church an historical fact is not past, but present, and what is historical (*das Geschichtliche*) is contemporaneous. This statement, that what is historical is contemporaneous, what is hidden is open, is made possible only where what is historical, what is hidden, has made itself contemporaneous and open, i.e., in faith in the miracle of God in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” “The Risen One himself creates belief and so points the way to himself as the Historical one. From here, faith needs no confirmation from history. The confirmation of historical investigation is irrelevant before the self-attestation of Christ in the present. In faith, history is known in the light of eternity. That is the direct access of faith to history.”¹⁰⁶

Bonhoeffer finally points out that the “self-attestation of Jesus Christ” is “handed down to us in Scripture.” Of course Scripture too partakes of the uncertainties of history. “But the Risen One encounters us right through the Bible with all its flaws.” Thus “the Jesus who cannot be grasped by history is the subject of faith in the resurrection.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 74–75.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 75–76.

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From what we have learned of Bonhoeffer we see that his Christ as Center is to all intents and purposes the same as the Christ-Event of the new hermeneutic, of the new quest of the theology as history. In all of these the historic Protestant hermeneutic is rejected as rational-determinist and irrational-indeterminist. In all of these the text of Scripture is interpreted in terms of hermeneutical principles based on the epistemology of Kant and his followers. In all of these the attempt is made to go beyond Barth and beyond Bultmann in terms of a Christ-Event, i.e., of an Act-theology in which a purely formal principle of unity is more consistently than ever before made wholly correlative to a purely formal principle of diversity.

O. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's Christ-Mystique

A word may here be added about Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's *Christ-Mystique*.

It might be thought that the so-called essentialist philosophy of Roman Catholicism would reject the Christ-Event of modern Protestant Act-theology. Do not the proponents of Act-theology constantly set their position over against the supposedly static categories of the Greeks? Do not Roman Catholic theologians reject the philosophy of Kant and his followers because of its subjectivism? All this is true but something more basic is also true. The essentialist philosophy based on Aristotle and the act-philosophy of Kant are alike based on the idea of human autonomy with its concomitant notions of abstract impersonal rationality and abstract

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impersonal irrationality. It is this fact that accounts for the current rapprochement of modern Roman Catholic and modern Protestant thinking.

As an illustration of this fact we call attention briefly to the similarity between the idea of Christ as the center of Bonhoeffer and of Christ as the Omega of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

Teilhard de Chardin is first a scientist, second a philosopher, and third a theologian. He offers what he thinks of as a totally integrated view of man and his world by means of the process of biological and cosmic evolution. All things are working in a process of interiorization toward their apex in Christ. Teilhard's categories are as activist as are those of any Protestant thinker.

“A cosmogenesis embracing and expanding the laws of our individual ontogenesis on a universal scale, in the form of neogenesis, a world that is being born instead of a world that is: that is what the phenomenon of man, suggests, indeed compels us to accept, if we are to find a place for Man in this process of evolution in which we are obliged to make room for him.”¹⁰⁸

You can see “a huge Consciousness” in the process of growth through the ages. A true view of evolution illumines the world from within by showing itself to be capable of fulfilling our highest mystical aspiration. As our vision leads upward

¹⁰⁸ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man*, trans. Norman Denny (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 140.

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along “the convergence of the cosmic lines” we see the centre of consciousness above and ahead of us.

Looking intently into the face of this “supreme Centre” it soon becomes clear that we must look far beyond and far above any mere aggregation of perfected Mankind. If it is to be capable of joining together in itself the prolonged fibres of the world, the apex of the cone within which we move can be conceived only as something that is ultra-conscious, ultra-personalized, ultra-present. It must reach and act upon us, not only indirectly, through the universal network of physical synthesis, but also, and even more, directly, from centre to centre (that is to say, from consciousness to consciousness) by touching the most sensitive point in ourselves.¹⁰⁹

By means of his principle of evolution Teilhard overcomes the “dualism” between a mechanistic realm of science and a personalistic realm of freedom.¹¹⁰ If we only take a glance backward from the “look-out Point in the universe” that has emerged, we witness the “realisation of a consummated human Thought.”¹¹¹ Thus in terms of cosmic evolution all history becomes light. The idea is like the *Lichtungsgeschichte* of Heidegger.

The future before mankind is inescapably bright. Love and peace cannot help but prevail.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹¹⁰ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, trans. Bernard Wall (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), p. 62.

¹¹¹ Teilhard de Chardin, *Future of Man*, p. 18.

At this stage the idea of Christian Humanism makes its appearance in Teilhard's argument. For Teilhard "By definition and in essence Christianity is the religion of the Incarnation: God united Himself with the world which He created, to unify it and in some sort incorporate it in Himself. To the worshipper of Christ this act expresses the history of the universe."¹¹² To those who are in Christ the whole of history appears as the "historical unfolding of the Incarnation." The true Christian teacher seeks for the gradual "incorporation of the World in the Word Incarnate." The whole of life may therefore be spoken of as "the general economy of salvation." This may also be called "divinisation." At the heart of the universe, each soul exists for God, in Our Lord. But all reality, even material reality, around each one of us, exists for our souls. Hence all reality, around each one of us, exists through our souls, for God in our Lord."¹¹³

In this picture of unification of all nature and history in Christ we have every element that is found in modern Protestantism. Teilhard's theology is an act-theology, built on an act-philosophy, built on an act-science. Teilhard, together with many modern Protestant thinkers, starts with man as autonomous. He has this supposedly autonomous man project a Christ-Ideal for himself. Through this Christ-Ideal he unifies all his conscious activities. Through this Christ-Ideal he pictures himself and all men with him as living in peace, world without end.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹¹³ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Mileau*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), p. 18.

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When Plotinus, the last great essentialist thinker built his dimension philosophy he excluded Christ. Many modern activist philosophers also exclude Christ. Many theologians seem to make Christ the Center of their thinking. Thomas Aquinas added Christ to a view of life already complete without him. He added Christ to Aristotle. Barth and Bultmann also added Christ to a view already complete without him. They added Christ to Kant.

In both cases Christ is crucified afresh. His followers capitulate to the demands of apostate man. The followers of Thomas Aquinas and the followers of Barth and Bultmann trim down the figurements of the Christ of Scripture till he is where man is, wallowing in a sea of chance.

We now look briefly at the struggle of modern man in his effort to find himself in terms of his ideal of himself. There are many who have undertaken to write the narrative of this struggle.

P. Gordon D. Kaufmann

For convenience we take the short and clear description of this effort in a book *Relativism, Knowledge and Faith* by Gordon D. Kaufmann.

Modern man knows for certain that the traditional Protestant view of man and his environment is intolerable. Modern thinkers, whether scientists, philosophers or theologians, even find one another's views of man and his world defective to the extent that these have carried over residual elements of traditional notions into their thinking.

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The traditional view, they say, was not based on the fact of man's historical consciousness. Everything that any one holding the traditional view might say would destroy the very foundation of intelligent predication. No question can be asked, let alone answered, except on the presupposition of the ultimacy or autonomy of the historical consciousness.

The "historical consciousness" must, however, satisfy itself that it has a dependable foundation on which to stand in order to demythologize the traditional faith. In other words, its own existential interpretation must support both its own effort to reach authentic existence as well as the effort to destroy the traditional position. We are now concerned primarily with the modern historical consciousness as it understands itself. We follow Kaufmann as he describes the self-understanding of modern man.

We shall think of the man who holds to a position like that of Luther or Calvin and call him the Reformation man. We shall, at the same time, think of the man who holds to a position like that of Kant and his followers and call him the modern man.

The issue is one of life and death. Both the Reformation man and the modern man think that the position of the other is destructive of all predication in any area of human interest. Kaufmann represents the modern man. He simply assumes that the Reformation man can do nothing for himself except reassert what is in an ever increasingly hollow voice, the untenable position he

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has always held. “To reaffirm the same old faith in a louder voice helps very little; it only gives further evidence of our deep anxieties.”¹¹⁴ Not that Kaufmann pretends to give any solution to the problems facing man. “In Western philosophy, there is such a widespread doubt about the validity and value of our thinking that almost the whole profession is in full retreat from the metaphysical enterprise, the attempt to grasp in thought the ‘Real.’ ” And “a similar assessment must be made of the theological scene.”¹¹⁵

Therefore “what is needed is an analysis of our thought processes which will enable us to understand why it is that our thought is relative and inadequate and subject to radical doubt, coupled with a careful assessment of the metaphysical and theological significance of this fact. It may be that if the relativism so persuasive of our culture would once be clearly understood, instead of desperately being fought off, we would be brought to a position from which metaphysics and theology also could be understood and become meaningful once again. It is to this end, that the present essay is directed.”¹¹⁶

We seek to come to the heart of the issue by re-examining “the anthropological basis of all our thinking and knowing” ... “in order to see more clearly what is involved in these processes and what can rightfully be claimed for them.” It is only by

¹¹⁴ Gordon D. Kaufman, *Relativism, Knowledge and Faith*, (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 7.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

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doing this that we can understand “what is actually happening in metaphysical and theological work.”¹¹⁷

Let the reader fear no resurgence of “theological imperialism.” Our analysis “is not theologically derived.... Every attempt has been made to do justice to the problem of the relativity of truth in its own terms and to avoid imposition of any dogmatic conclusions, of whatever school, on the analysis. The validity of the argument must be assessed, therefore, with reference to the anthropological question: Is the actual cognitive posture of the self, as we know and understand that stance in our own time, adequately and validly described herein?”¹¹⁸ “Hence we start here with the attempt simply to understand the problem of relativism, not with the Christian dogmas of creation, sin and redemption.”¹¹⁹

The reader will see from what has been said that Kaufmann is out to discover “the structure of the knowing self” by means of a structure of reality as a whole. Reality as a whole must not be what the Reformation man says it is. There must be no God who creates and directs the course of history in accordance with his counsel. The principle of unity must be above the Creator-creature distinction. The principle of plurality must not be that of the God who individuates by complete description and determination *zum vornherein*: it must rather be that of pure openness, or contingency.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

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The self must find itself in terms of the correlativity of the all inclusive impersonal principle of rationality and an all-inclusive impersonal principle of pure contingency. The self must therefore, at the same time, be wholly above all contingency and wholly immersed within pure contingency. Moreover the self must discover all other human selves, and any possibly existing divine selves, by the same means. Moreover, any mediator between God and man that modern man feels he needs for the purpose of developing his authentic self must be constructed on the same lines. He must be both wholly other than man, by being more purely contingent than man; and he must be wholly other than man by being more purely rational than man. His being must be more purely composed of the act of interaction between a rationality wholly beyond the power of conceptual understanding of man and a contingency beyond the faith of man. It is the historical consciousness that has, by means of its productive imagination, developed a new type of understanding (*Verstehen*) that combines the work of Kant's concept (*Begriff*) and ideal (*Idee*). By means of this new mode of understanding twentieth century man has for the first time understood the human self. Even Kant had difficulty in his effort to construct a unified self. Kant had two selves, a phenomenal and a noumenal. His phenomenal self lost itself in the determinist laws it had imposed on the pure raw stuff of "experience" in order to have permanence in nature. His noumenal self was free from the determinism it had imposed on the raw stuff of nature but, for this very reason, it lost itself in pure contingency. Kant could not construct a self that was self-conscious except in

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terms of the mutually destructive principles of abstract determinism and abstract indeterminism. But now the historical consciousness has introduced a new revolutionary approach by which the self can discover itself. The historical consciousness starts from above instead of from below. It postulates a self as the source of the distinction between unity and diversity in reality. Post-Kantian Idealism attempted to do some such thing but its categories of thought were still too static. The results of its efforts were, accordingly, too deterministic and rationalistic. When theologians tried to use these categories of the Idealists for the construction of their Christ, the being of this Christ was not identified with his act of saving all men. Idealism still wanted a philosophy that was “universally valid” by virtue of its meeting the demands of abstract logic. Carl Becket was right when he said: “unfortunately for the ‘permanent contribution’ and the universally valid philosophy, time passes ...”¹²⁰ The historical consciousness has taken time more seriously than did Kant. It has, therefore, for the first time been able to do away with all such dualisms as that between the phenomenal and the noumenal, the logical and the factual. All reality is historical and the self is the historical concentration point of the cosmic historical. Rationality and factuality are seen to be supplemental aspects of the historical. And the individual historical consciousness is an aspect of the central comprehensive cosmic historical consciousness.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

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It is when we begin our research from the stance of the universal historical consciousness that we give up seeking to escape from the relativism of knowledge by means of formal logical arguments. The “more thoughtful relativistic thinkers ... contend that far from undercutting and destroying man’s moral and intellectual life, a relativistic perspective actually frees man from subjection to uncritical dogmatisms and enables him to develop broader and more comprehensive knowledge of himself and his world.” The relativist view of knowledge inherent in the approach of the historical consciousness sets us free “from thought based on a static, absolutistic model of truth ...” In consequence we “are enabled to grasp certain kinds of truth not otherwise comprehensible.”¹²¹ Thus Karl Manheim contends “that socio-historical ‘truths’ ... are apprehensible only from certain socio-historical perspectives ...”¹²²

In this connection Kaufmann refer, as many others do, to R. G. Collingwood’s work *The Idea of History* and to the work of Wilhelm Dilthey as expressing a view of relativism that for the first time enables man really to understand himself and his world. These men and others have helped us, says Kaufmann, to see “that truth and error are always truth and error from a given historical perspective and this broadens and changes the problem considerably.”¹²³ “Thinking must be a function of the concrete historical and psychological situation in

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

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which it emerges, as well as of certain norms of truth and error.”¹²⁴

Here we have reached what Kaufmann calls internal relativism. “Internal relativism, we can now say in summary and in contrast, attempts to understand from within and to appreciate fully the claims of truth of alternative philosophical positions, and is thus faced with the problems of the epistemological and metaphysical significance arising from the awareness of the perspectival character of every philosophy and of all thinking.”¹²⁵

Let us then watch the development of the historical consciousness.

We ask at “what points do situational factors enter into the cognitive process significantly?” If we are to find an answer to this query “it is necessary to begin at the very lowest level of mental activity and reconstruct upward to the levels at which we are conscious of objects, other persons, ourselves, meanings, values, etc. This involves attempting to see how we become conscious of anything at all.”¹²⁶

It is particularly at this point that Kaufmann wants to take the element of pure contingency even more seriously than Kant. Kant began his research by looking for the presuppositions of a fully developed consciousness. With this method he was unable to go underneath the idea of a system of logical categories. But surely we must go back to the

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

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emergence of consciousness in human infancy, and to the lower species of existence.¹²⁷ “In order properly to understand our later knowledge of external reality, it is necessary to see how reality is mediated to the organism at pre-cognitive levels, how consciousness and knowledge have developed out of these levels, and whether they have wholly freed themselves from these earlier stages.”¹²⁸

Our “cognitive processes are enmeshed and intertwined from the beginning with the feelings and drives of the organism.”¹²⁹

We soon discover that “the subject-object polarity ... emerges in the lowest level of consciousness, as the most fundamental level of all experience.” “The development of this subject pole into a self-conscious thinking and valuing person, and, on the other hand, the distinguishing in the object-pole of inanimate or dead ‘things’ from other persons, comes much later, together with the appearance of a great variety of qualitative and quantitative distinctions in both subject and object. The total self is involved at every point throughout this gradually emerging self- and other-consciousness.”¹³⁰

In this communal development of the object the subject has a certain priority. Even though we reject the dualism between the subject and the object of knowledge as Descartes thought of it we continue to hold that we have a “fuller knowledge of the subject”

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 32–33.

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than of the object. Accordingly we interpret the “ ‘object’ we encounter in the world in terms of analogies with our selfexperience.”¹³¹ “This analogical interpretation of the object in terms of the inner reality known to the subject is effective at every point.”¹³²

“Thus our underlying conception of external reality as a structure of parts all related to one another in some way which we can come to know is an analogical interpretation of the object in terms of our inner experience as subjects centered in a unified purposing system which unites past and future within the present.” Soon we shall see that “all of our knowledge is such imaginative construction.”¹³³

To understand ourselves in the present we must go back into the past. We must bring up the past into our experience of the present. This can be done if at the same time, we project ourselves into the future. We must also bring down the future into our experience of the present.

Bringing the past into our present is done by the “genetic analysis of the emergence of consciousness.”¹³⁴ Bringing the future into our present is done by projecting the ideal “of complete and final unity” of experience and measuring our present state of development by this ideal.¹³⁵

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

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It is only if we thus envelop the past and the future into the present that we can escape the idea of either an absolute beginning or an absolute consummation: "Consciousness always begins in, and is a further development of the work of previous consciousness, and thought always begins in, and is a further development of previous consciousness and thought. There is never, then, any absolute beginning place for thought, nor is any absolutely final conclusion ever reached. It is just this asymptotic character that distinguishes mental processes from physical processes."¹³⁶

When theologians have grasped this proper view of the historical consciousness they then learn how to deal more intelligently with the general Christological problem than has ever been done before. Meaning, they now realize, "is the category in terms of which all of experience is brought into a coherent whole." But not all the elements of our experience are on a level with one another. We must therefore select "certain elements or events" of our experience and interpret the rest of our experience by means of them.¹³⁷ These elements or events we speak of as "revelatory moments." Of course, they, in turn, depend for their meaning on the meaningfulness of the whole. "Every meaningful experience presupposes a revelatory event, or series of events, which constitutes the meaning itself."¹³⁸

Now then we can state the Christological problem in such a way that it has meaning for the historical

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

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consciousness. Every position “is actually immersed in history and draws its meaning from some (implicit or explicit) center of history, or, as we might now say, from some Christ.’ Faith in this Christ, i.e., acceptance of the validity of the meaning revealed in this Christ, is the presupposition on which of meaning in the position depends.”¹³⁹

Kaufmann is now ready to sum up his faith. “It involves nothing less than faith in the power of the center of meaning over the future, over the entire future, i.e., that which gives meaning to the past and present can bring the future, with all its openness and indeterminateness, under its sway. That is to say, all thinking, whether this is recognized consciously or not, involves a faith in providence, a faith that the meaning which we know is nothing else than the Lord of history, the One who gives all of history its meaning and who finally stands at the ‘end of history’ in judgment and redemption of both the meaninglessness and the meaningfulness of history.”¹⁴⁰

In his entire argument Kaufmann guards himself against the possible confusion of his position with that of the historic Christian view. He makes plain that his method and his metaphysics imply one another and that the resulting view is totally opposed to the method and metaphysic of the Reformation man. We quote at length: “The position here taken is of course no proof either of the existence of God or that Jesus Christ is coming on the clouds of heaven on the ‘last day’ of history, or

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 111–112.

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anything of the sort. Such naïve and literalistic formulations of the eschatological problem only obscure the issue at stake, namely, that our every thought and action contains a reference to, and is based on, a faith about the future, not only the immediate future, but (implicitly) the whole future; and this is the case whether we recognize it or deny it. This of course says nothing of whether our faith is justified or is an illusion; or to use more traditional terms, this tells nothing about whether there is a God or not. Rather, it tells us that at the deepest level of our beings we believe that meaning overcomes meaninglessness in history, and this is in fact what we live by. This faith is the very bedrock of our every affirmation of truth; it is that on which all else rests; it is something we cannot deny without denying our very denial of it.”¹⁴¹

Kaufmann’s position is that of the “natural man” in the New Testament. Kaufmann openly sides with Adam in his rebellion against his creator and benefactor. Adam wanted freedom in terms of pure contingency. At the same time he wanted to carve out his own nature, by obeying the law of his own being, i.e., by understanding himself exhaustively.

Did he not have a right to be himself? How could he be himself if he was treated like a child? He must have *Lebensraum*. That meant he must nowhere, now or ever, be confronted with the claims of God. Even when God asks for his obedience and love in the interest of his self-development Adam cannot respond otherwise than with a resounding *Nein*.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

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According to Kaufmann all of human consciousness is directed in the first and deepest sense toward self and other-understanding. But how could I be and identify myself as a true self so long as I think of God giving me my nature. Surely if my nature is not what I have made it to be without any interference on the part of any one, then it is the nature of a puppet.

We shall let Kaufmann carry on a dialogue with the God of Luther and Calvin

(1) Kaufmann's Dialogue with God

Kaufmann: I am glad to meet you sir. To introduce myself to you I may say that I am of the lineage of Adam, of Cain and of Lamech. Of course you know, better than anyone else, that these are mythological figures. But then all knowledge has a mythopoetic origin. All forms of consciousness, such as your creator-consciousness and my creature-consciousness, have emerged from the womb of chance, call it pure contingency. When Adam is said to have named the animals this means, being demythologized and being existentially interpreted, that the mind divine and human somehow emerged from the bottomless and shoreless ocean of pure chance, fully equipped with a set of *a priori* categories by means of which he not only names or identifies all things but by means of which he can determine in advance what can and what cannot come out of the womb of chance.

In short, Adam introduced what we call today the historical consciousness. What a great genius he was

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in doing so! With unequalled *Wesensschau* he saw what reality can and cannot be, and with one grand *Entschluss* he declared his independence from you. He was not afraid of your threats because he knew that in a universe of pure contingency you could not carry them out. He was aware that you yourself, as well as he, developed your sense of identity by emerging from lower species of consciousness and ultimately from pure chance. He knew that your supposed sovereignty by which you were seeking to lord it over him was, like his sovereignty, based on the ideal of the complete control of all things by which you were seeking to appropriate yourself.

Now God, if you are interested in talking to me please take off your mask of absoluteness. You and I alike have started our process of becoming self-conscious by wondering why anything at all exists rather than nothing. Neither you nor I can be certain of anything. All knowledge is, and must be, relative. Sure, you are omniscient because you are omnipotent. But so am I. We are both omniscient and omnipotent in terms of our approximation to the ideal of absolute identity of knowledge and being. Parmenides said that it is the same to be and to know. But what Parmenides did not see is that this identity of knowing and being is only an ideal and therefore can never become a reality. Parmenides wanted to conceptualize all reality. He worked with static categories. Plato and Aristotle and most of the church theologians followed him in this. But now the Reformation has come with its idea of free salvation without any works by anyone, God or man. And now Kant has become the philosopher of Protestantism and we have learned how to join

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science, philosophy and theology, together and have, as a result, a unified insight into their internal relations with one another. We have subordinated the ideal of conceptualizing interpretation to the idea of *Verstehen* by the means of the limiting concept. By *Wesensschau* we are able to unite in one vision the phenomenal realm which we know and the noumenal realm in which we believe.

We therefore carry on what we, following Kant, call critical thinking. Thinking critically means that we recognize the relativity of all knowledge. Some of your followers fear that by our method of critical thinking we endanger the value and validity of theology. But the contrary is actually the case. We can by our critical method of thinking do better justice to you and your works than has ever been done before. We can, in particular, do better justice by your Son and by your Book and especially by your Holy Spirit. We now know what, of course, you knew all the time, that the biblical writers were really critical thinkers in the way we are today. Theirs was an inward teleology. Theirs was a perspectival view of truth. They knew how to subordinate the I-it dimension to the I-thou dimension. But they lived ahead of their time. The dark ages of dogmatism followed. But now, with the emergence of the historical consciousness we see the light as they saw it. We now have an answer to the three questions (a) What can I know? (b) What must I do? and (c) What may I hope?

At this point Kaufmann gave God a summary of the content of the last two chapters of his book.

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But God did not reply to Mr. Kaufmann, other than by the reply Jesus gave the rich man who lifted up his eyes in Hades offering excuses for himself for not heeding the signals and the tolling of the bells that warned of the coming judgment. Dives had had a clear revelation of God's law and of his offer of grace on condition of repentance when he was on earth. His "five brethren" had the same light that he had had in his day. No extra, private revelation, of the sort he requested would be given him. He had sinned against better knowledge; the time for repentance was over.

Kaufmann seemed to be rather taken back by God's simple ignoring or rejection of his entire process of critical thinking. Did not God appreciate the fact that his revelation of himself to men was at last made acceptable to them? Did not God enjoy being addressed as the personification of the ideals of truth, goodness, and beauty on the part of would-be autonomous man? Was God angry? Surely then he is not God. God is love and love is God.

(2) Kaufmann's Dialogue with Malchus

On his way home Kaufmann met Dr. Malchus. Dr. Malchus was a teaching theologian. The title of his Ph.D. dissertation was *The Rise (the Historical Consciousness)*. This had never been published but it served as a foundation for Malchus' future work.

Malchus had for many years been a sort of border-line figure. He had been interested in bringing the work of modern science, of modern philosophy and of modern theology into one total

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picture. It is of this total picture that we hear him speak to Kaufmann.

Malchus: Gordon, I think you have done a very fine piece of work. I am interested in the same general subject that concerns you. We are both interested in asking "how it all hangs together." We must be able to show our enemies that our total picture makes sense and that therefore their total pictures do not make sense. Fuchs is quite right in putting the matter this way. The day of battle skirmishes is past. *Es geht ums Ganze*. The enemy would say: "The battle of Armageddon is upon us." On our view experience has meaning and on their view experience has no meaning. They say the same thing about us. It is an amazing thing to me that they are today more outspoken in saying this than they have been before. We have recently been standing aghast at our own victories. By means of the "historical consciousness" we have attained to a unified view of human experience. For that very reason we can now destroy the last remnants of sense that might, to some people, still seem to cling to the enemy's position. We have now shown all the world that nothing can have meaning for any man unless it is what is by virtue of the meaning assigned to it by the historical consciousness. We have made plain to all men that the historical consciousness is the presupposition of the possibility of discovering meaning in human experience. To deny this we must first affirm it. You yourself have put it this way.

But now, Gordon, I must admit to a measure of anxiety still. What we seem to be saying may be put

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in three propositions: 1. Nobody knows. 2. You are wrong.

3. We are right. These three propositions were flung at me as a taunt by the enemy. I have so far not been able to escape the idea that there may be truth in them.

If we say that nobody knows anything about anything, we seem to place the two positions, that of our enemy and that of ourselves, on a par with one another. Both parties would be lost in the woods.

But then, the enemy tells us that we are, even on saying that nobody knows, not only saying that we as creatures cannot know but that our creator-Redeemer God cannot know anything either. You are, in effect saying: (1) nobody knows, and (2) you are wrong. And of course than you are already implying (3) that you do know that we are wrong and that you are right.

This description of our position as a whole may, it seems to me, be subdivided so as to apply to the question of origin, of progress and of the destiny of man. You remember how Augustine said that the kingdom of God, the enemy's kingdom, and the kingdom of man, our kingdom, have mutually destructive views on the questions of the origin, the development and the climax of history.

Apparently the enemy is now, at this late date, making a desperate effort to make our position appear ridiculous at first glance. Obviously, he says,

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it makes no sense to say that no human being knows anything. If such were the case, it would make still less sense to say that then, in that case, one party is wrong and the other party is right. Gordon, the whole thing troubles me. The enemy say that everybody knows. He says that not only everybody knows in a general nondescript sort of way but that everybody knows that what God says through Christ, in Scripture is true. We are supposed to know naturally by virtue of our constitution as men, that God is our creator and that we are therefore his creatures. The enemy says that “knowing God,” we hold under, i.e., repress, this knowledge because we do not want to lace up to the truth. He says that we are covenant-breakers. We have spurned our Creator’s love, in and through Adam, the first man. He adds that now we spurn the offer of salvation through Christ because we do not want to admit that we are wrong. We are deceived by the “spirit of the world” which lies in darkness and having been deceived we deceive ourselves and as many others as we can. We demythologize the narrative of Christ and his redeeming work in order to make ourselves believe that we, and we alone, have done justice by the facts of human experience.

But in saying that nobody knows, we mean that nobody can possibly know that the scriptural narrative is true. How could any man know about a world of reality of which no one could have any experience. How could we know anything of the “triune God of Scripture?” Of such a god we could never have any experience.

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The enemy describes us as “the natural man.” The “natural man” is said not to know the things of God, because he does not have the Spirit of God. At this point knowing God is said to involve loving and obeying God. The “natural man” is said to be dead in sin. He is said to hate God and his neighbor. Even if he is helpful and kind to his neighbor he is given no credit for this; such kindness is said to operate in man, not because his nature has any good thing in it, but because God in his common, non-saving grace enables and impels him to do “good” things. The best of us are said to remain under the wrath and curse of God, unless we repent and admit that we are wrong and he is right. Our scientists, for all their open-minded search to discover “what really happened” are said to be apostate and wicked men. Our philosophers, for all their effort to bring coherence into our experience, are said to subordinate the laws of logic to their evil goal. Even our theologians, for all their zeal to find authentic experience for man through his participation in the Christ-Event, are said to be followers of the anti-Christ.

When the new questers and the men of the new hermeneutic speak of Jesus as a pointer to a God of love, of indiscriminate, general love, then they are said to do this in the interest of denying the existence of the really existing sovereign God.

All this is psychoanalysis with a vengeance. All the depth-psychologists have become patients at the mercy of the enemy. The Greek philosophers, the process-thinkers, down to the existentialist philosophers and theologians, down to the men of

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the new hermeneutics and the men of the new quest for the historical Jesus, one and all are said to be concocting their schemes, in the last analysis, in order to rationalize their apostasy from the truth.

The things gets worse and worse. Something radical must be done about it.

Take the first statement to the effect that nobody knows. The enemy says that Adam introduced that statement into the world. In order to justify his disobedience Adam appealed to his right to understand the commandment. How can I understand what you say, Adam said to God, if you really are the kind of being you say you are? If you are really self-contained then you must remain in isolation. The only way I can understand you is if you are interdependent with me. And the only way we can be interdependent with one another is if we are together dependent upon an all-comprehensive world of pure contingency. Our I-Thou interrelatedness must be interdependent with our common I-it relations. I cannot identify myself or relate myself to you except in terms of an open universe in which I can develop my authentic self.

But it is perfectly clear from your overbearing attitude toward me that you do not regard yourself as a free personality developing yourself in an open universe. You think you can individuate not only yourself but me also by complete description. You think your knowledge is adequate to being. You think that all history is your estate and that we, your creatures, are your puppets. No thanks. God; the reason I can understand your command for what it

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is and the reason I courteously decline to obey you, is that you are actually, together with me, emerging from the sea-weeds of the deep of pure contingency. You are trying to tell me that you know ultimate reality because you are ultimate reality. You add that I know myself because of the fact that I am what you say I am; your image-bearer. You add that my knowledge of myself and of the world is true because it is creaturely analogue of your knowledge. You say that my choice is significant because it takes place within a created world that is and will be what you want it to be. No thank you, God; it is internally contradictory to say that I am responsible to you and that I must choose to obey or not to obey you when, as a matter of fact, I am bound by your all-comprehensive and all-determining plan.

Now, Gordon, we know that this whole story is but a mythological expression of the emerging consciousness of man struggling with itself to become itself. I really like the Adam myth. Chaos and old night we must air assume. Kant has helped us to familiarize ourselves with this idea. But for Adam it must not have been easy. He had to fight for the idea emerging within himself. The poor man thought that an all-knowing because all-controlling God really existed. As the first man, emerging from pre-rational forms of consciousness, he knew and really wondered why he or why anything about him existed at all. As he rubbed the slime out of his eyes he, at the same time, realized that since he wondered why anything should exist at all, some marvelous thing had happened within him. He realized that he had the answer to his wondering question. This answer first came to him “externally”;

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it came in the form of a really all-knowing, because all-controlling, God who had been there before all time. Only gradually did it dawn upon Adam, i.e., early man, that in order to be conscious of the time-sequence of things and in order to distinguish one thing from another thing in the realm of chance he must have a look-out tower above time. At first this idea spoke to man in the form of the myth of the existence of a supra-temporal God. This God “revealed” himself to Adam as existing in the splendid isolation of eternal self-contemplation. However, gradually Adam realized that a God, who is not what he is in relation to him as a man, a God whose commands man does not recognize as the commands of his authentic self to his empirical self, cannot be God. I do not, says Adam, understand him and cannot, in self-respect, obey him.

In short Adam gradually began to realize that the absolute questionableness of all things, due to the idea of pure contingency, needs for its correlative the absolute understandability of all things. Man must participate simultaneously in pure being as pure thought thinking itself and participate in pure non-being as pure contingency. Thus we see that as a myth the Adam story is very useful but that as telling us “how it happened” (*wie es geschehen*) it would be destructive of the very foundation of our intelligible experience. As a myth the story shows us that our human consciousness needs both the idea of pure indeterminism and of pure determinism, of pure irrationalism and of pure rationalism. Taken as ordinary history, well Kant has told us all about it, why repeat what he said so well?

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After Kant we have all been able to see this point. Especially now that the men of the process philosophy, and notably such men as Robert Collingwood, have shown us the full implication of the idea of the historical consciousness we can see that even the “historical Jesus” is indispensable as a myth and destructive of predication when taken as a reality. If “he” were a reality, he would be a menace to our free personality in the way that the God of Adam was a menace to his free personality. If I were to take his saying: “I and the Father are one,” as indicative of his identity with a supra-temporal or eternal, all-controlling reality, then our salvation would depend on his arbitrary decree. The foundation of knowledge and of ethics would be destroyed. Fuchs and Ebeling, have shown clearly that we must demythologize John’s gospel and say: Love, universal love, comes to expression to us through the “historical Jesus” as a limiting notion.

But now, Gordon, though I know that nobody knows, i.e., that there can be no God who knows because he controls all things, and that therefore the enemy is wrong; can you show me a little more convincingly than you or any one else has done so far how we are right? I know you don’t claim to be right in the sense that you have personally, in your experience satisfied the ideal of Parmenides that to know anything at all one must know all things exhaustively. You do not claim with Spinoza you have personally experienced that the order and connection of things is identical with the order and connection of knowledge. We all bless the name of Kant. We know that absolute knowledge of absolute being is only an ideal. Contingency now has its

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rightful place, in science, in philosophy and in theology.

But tell me, are we not really just as rationalistic and deterministic as either Parmenides or Spinoza ever were? They made positive *a priori* universal judgments about all reality. We make negative *a priori* judgments about all reality. Their positive *a priori* assertions required the destruction of time and therefore of history. Our negative *a priori* assertions also require the destruction of time and therefore of history, depended upon purely contingent reality. If he was to be real, man had to renounce his individuality and therewith his self-consciousness.

Now, what troubles me, Gordon, is that Kant and we, following him, still seem to do essentially the same sort of thing that Adam, that Parmenides and that Spinoza did. First we bravely demythologize the traditional principle of individuation by the counsel of God in terms of the idea of pure contingency. We insist that no form of consciousness can possibly exist except that which emerges from the womb of chance. Adam and Parmenides, Kant and, in effect, we too still claim for ourselves the omniscience and omnipotence which the God who met Adam claimed for himself. We cannot identify ourselves except in terms of a principle of abstract rationality that kills us in the process of doing so.

I cannot see, Gordon, that any one of us has made good the claim that nobody knows. All of us seem to need the very God we reject.

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We try to reconstruct him in our own image; we make “him” stand for the ideal of universal indiscriminate love and fall down before the idol we have made.

You have said, and we all say everyday, that the idea of our free personality, operating at the borderline between pure indeterminism and pure determinism is the presupposition of intelligible predication. We claim to be able to say “I am” and make it mean something even when we profess to float on a bottomless ocean of chance, and at the same time profess to be linked into an eternal chain of determinism.

I keep saying to myself that nobody knows, that the enemy is wrong and that I am right. I am not afraid; I say to myself and yet and yet—O mole, I am afraid. Please Gordon, if you see God again do not tell him about this. He may actually think that I fear the “wrath of the Lamb.” God takes everything so seriously.

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B. H. M. Kuitert

4

1. Kuitert's Main Writings

We turn now to a currently influential Reformed theologian in the Netherlands, H. M. Kuitert.

Kuitert's first important work bears the title *De Mensvormigheid Gods*. This title is difficult to translate. It signifies the human form of God. In this book Kuitert is concerned to show that the theologians of the church, whether Protestant or Catholic, whether Reformed or Lutheran, unfortunately have interpreted the living biblical view of God's covenantal dealings with man in terms of the Greek notion of God as a static, otiose deity.

It was in particular Plato's view of God and of man that served many theologians from Origen down, as the standard of what Scripture could teach.¹⁴² On this traditional view God-in-himself is wholly transcendent of man and the world. Man in himself can have no knowledge of God except in so far as his intellect participates in God.¹⁴³ All the problematics with respect to man's relation to God

⁴Van Til, C. (1974). *The New Hermeneutic*. The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company: Phillipsburg, NJ.

¹⁴²Harminus Martinus Kuitert, *De Mensvormigheid Gods* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1962), p. 66.

¹⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 183.

that the theologians discuss, spring from this false notion of a God-in-himself and a man-in-himself.

Theologians, in general, orthodox as well as liberal, have, as a consequence, been unable to do justice to the biblical view of the relation of God and man. We must start our statement of the biblical truth with the fact that God is what he is in relation to man and that man is what he is in relation to God. "If we speak not from the point of view of a speculative *natura dei* but from the point of God's being as inherently covenantal, then we escape this problematic entirely. The being of God in his deeds and words, and in the sense the identity between the essence of God and the revelation of God, liberates us at once from the transcendence-immanence problematic."¹⁴⁴ The God of Scripture is the God who is present with his people as they walk from Egypt to the promised land.¹⁴⁵ To see the significance of this fact is to have the truly biblical principle of hermeneutics. Then we no longer stumble over intellectual dualisms but see the truly ethical relationships between God and man.¹⁴⁶ "Starting from the fact that the biblical witness to God and his saving acts comes to us in the biblical-Israelitish idiom, that is to say, in a language which is not only historically datable and obsolete, but which presupposes another world of life and thought than does ours, then we understand

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

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that the basic hermeneutical question is indeed that of ‘understanding’ (*Verstehen*).”¹⁴⁷

We shall seek to ascertain how Kuitert’s notion of *Verstehen* is similar to and how it differs in meaning from that of the new hermeneutic of such men as Fuchs and Ebeling.

A second publication of Kuitert’s bears the title, *The Reality of the Faith*. What is meant by Christian Faith? “What is the meaning and value of all our speaking and preaching about God and his saving deeds?” “Is God more than the image-ing forth of our deepest desires?”¹⁴⁸

In the past theologians did what today we are also trying to do. They sought to speak to men in the idiom of the day. That idiom was metaphysics. Man’s essence was thought to be intellectual. The theologians agreed with this. Accordingly they presented Christianity as a series of intellectual propositions which men should accept as true. They sought, in one way or another, to “prove” the Christian position by intellectual argument. They did not realize that nothing can be said about a God-in-himself and a man-in-himself. Men must be brought to a confrontation with God as he is present to them in Christ. And we must meet Christ in person-to-person confrontation, not by means of intellectual assertion about him. “The narrative of Jesus Christ is the tradition of the Christian church, i.e., that is to

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

¹⁴⁸ Harminus Martinus Kuitert, *De realiteit van het geloof* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1967), p. 16.

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say, it must, in the last analysis, be accepted by faith.”¹⁴⁹

That God is God *pro-me* I can accept only in faith. We must make a radical correction with respect to the traditional view of God and of man and his faith with God with the help of existential philosophy. Yet, we must not go all the way with this philosophy the manner in which it defends its anti-metaphysical views. We must discover a view that lies between these two extremes. In fact we have discovered such a view. The great discovery on the basis of which we have spoken, was that of history and with it—when one takes it seriously—of the historicity of man and his formulations.

Due to their metaphysical bias theologians of the past repressed “the historical element of the gospel narrative as far as possible.” As a consequence they lost the peculiar subjectivity which marks the Christian faith as based upon God’s historical method of dealing with us.”¹⁵⁰

Speaking on the basis of the great discovery of the historical character of the relation of God to man, we do justice both to the reality of God and to the reality of man’s faith in God. “We do justice to the ‘is’ of ‘God is’ only if we maintain that in its speaking of God, theology is concerned with a reality that is *sui generis*, which requires an order of speech which is also *sui generis*.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

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Working on the basis of our great discovery we can avoid the extremes represented by the traditional metaphysical and by the current anti-metaphysical tendency. Our starting point must therefore be that of tradition (*traditum*). Tradition implies that the material of the substance with which theology deals has come to us historically.¹⁵² Accordingly historical-critical research is given its rights. This must be said against orthodoxy. On the other hand critical historical research does not imply a total subjectivising or existentialising of the faith.¹⁵³ This must be said against extreme existentialism.

It is thus that in working with his great discovery Kuitert seeks to lead us through the labyrinth of modern theology. It is with the hermeneutical principle that is involved in the historical consciousness that we must seek to make the Christian faith acceptable to its cultured despisers.

The third publication of Kuitert's to be discussed is *Do You Understand What You Read?* It is dedicated to "Gerrit Cornelis Berkouwer in gratitude for his inimitable book, *Holy Scripture 2*."

In this brief publication we see Kuitert apply the method of understanding involved in his discovery of the historical consciousness to the Genesis narrative. A proper method of hermeneutic requires us to reject the paradise narrative as not being historical in the orthodox sense of the word. Is Kuitert then, at this point, contradicting himself?

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 161.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

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Does he say that God's relation to man and man's relation to God are exclusively historical and then proceed to deny the historical character of the Genesis narrative? No, Kuitert does not contradict himself. The Genesis narrative must be denied its traditional "historical" character in order that it may become subordinate to the true historical character of God's confrontation with man in Christ. What Kuitert is Saying, in effect, is that we must make use of the distinction between *Historie* and *Geshichte* as this distinction is thought of by Barth and recent existentialist theologians. We need this distinction in order to maintain the primacy of Christ as over against Adam. Taking the Genesis account as historical in the ordinary sense involves and is involved in the whole idea of taking the Bible as an historical book. This entire traditional "historical" view of God's revelation to man keeps us from understanding the truly historical (*Geschichtlich*) relation to God to man.

On the other hand we must not go all the way with Bultmann. There is undoubtedly much truth in Bultmann's approach. But he makes too absolutistic a distinction between *Historie* and *Geschichte*. We cannot reduce the narratives of the gospels pertaining to Christ to mere projections of man's experience cast on the screen of nature and history.¹⁵⁴ Bultmann reduces the narratives of Scripture to a projection of the spirit of true human inwardness. This goes too far. It is the opposite extreme of saying that all that we are told in Scripture actually happened because we are told it

¹⁵⁴ Harminus Martinus Kuitert, *Verstaat Gij Wat Gij Leest?* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1972), p. 51.

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did in Scripture.¹⁵⁵ Steering somewhere between literalistic historicism and Bultmann's extreme existentialism Kuitert says that it all depends on the scope of the narrative of Scripture. At this point Kuitert has, apparently, sought to follow and go beyond his instructor, Dr. Berkouwer.¹⁵⁶ The purpose of Scripture is to witness to God's words and deeds of saving grace in Christ. "To maintain the authority of Scripture apart from the question of the purpose of Scripture, reduces Scriptural authority to an empty authority, and this empty authority leads to the exchange of the freedom of the children of God for the tyranny of man."¹⁵⁷

"Without having regard to the purpose of Scripture one cannot distinguish between the authority of Scripture and the authority of the Koran."¹⁵⁸

If then we are to understand what we read when we open the Bible, we must start from the "great discovery" of the historicness of man and reality. This means that our understanding is a *Verstehen* patterned after the *Verstehen* of modern existentialism, but a *Verstehen* that guards against the extremes of the *Verstehen* of the existentialists.

A fourth work of Kuitert bears the title *Anders Gezegd*. This book contains addresses dealing with such subjects as the following: "The Good Creation."

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁵⁶ For a discussion of Berkouwer's view of Scripture see C. Van Til, *The Sovereignty of Grace* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1969.)

¹⁵⁷ Kuitert, *Verstaat Gij Wat Gij Leest?*, p. 43.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

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In this chapter Kuitert deals as he did in *Verstaat Gif What Gif Leest* with the problem of the Genesis account of man's creation. The traditional interpretation of Genesis says Kuitert, is exegetically unjustified.¹⁵⁹ The Genesis account of origins is a "reworking" of what the covenant people of God learned from her neighbors.¹⁶⁰ The idea of creation springs from the idea of the covenant. As such it was considered as a gracious gift of God. Karl Barth has taught us this fact.¹⁶¹ We must add this ethical dimension of thought to that of natural science. Many non-Christian thinkers will agree with us that a full view or adequate view of reality requires us to go beyond that of natural science.¹⁶² The view Kuitert urges us to adopt does, he tells us, do even better justice to Scripture than the old view and can be made intelligible to modern man.

The second chapter of *Anders Gezegd* deals with the relation of "Creation and Evolution." The old quarrel between creation and evolution is a thing of the past. All that Genesis teaches us is "Israel's faith in the beneficent control of her covenant-partner-God, over all that exists."¹⁶³ It is to be expected that orthodox people will not accept this obviously biblical view of origins. The orthodox view always failed to do justice to the human factor in Scriptural revelation. Accordingly, now that, at long last, this human factor is receiving its due, the orthodox

¹⁵⁹ Harminus Martinus Kuitert, *Anders Gezegd* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1970), p. 12.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

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Christian rebels.¹⁶⁴ The new view undermines his static views of God and his revelation. The new view offers a dynamic covenantal, genuinely historical, notion of God's covenant-dealings with man. Orthodoxy will have none of it. Interpreting the relation of God to man statically, the orthodox reader of Scripture has no eye for the prophetic insight that the Genesis narrative must be taken as a "teaching-model" of God's leading his people on in their victory over chaos.¹⁶⁵ Orthodoxy has no eye for the fact that Genesis seeks to teach us that we must look upon the whole of history, i.e., the process of becoming of man and the world, as the movement of God the creator in the present.¹⁶⁶

Looked at in this way the idea of sin is seen to be the negative, the contra, that which goes against history, in one word: regression.

Still further, taking Genesis as a teaching-model we see, as orthodoxy is unable to see, the true nature of redemption. Our "reformulation of the Christian faith" does away with the traditional dualism between creation and redemption. The appearance of Jesus Christ in our human history teaches us that there is only one history.

The traditional scheme of creation-fall-redemption had no adequate principle of unity as it had no adequate principle of diversity with which to interpret history. We now have an adequate notion of diversity in the idea of chaos as the non-created

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

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principle of contingency. We now have an adequate principle of unity in the idea of Christ as Lord of history, as the victor over Chaos. In Christ's appearance we have the principle of consummation. We can now at last do justice to Paul's idea of Christ from whom, through whom and to whom are all things.¹⁶⁷

In his chapter on "*Schriftberoep in de Ethiek*," Kuitert seeks to show us that this new, this dynamic, Christ-centered view of history gives us the proper principle of biblical hermeneutics. The traditional principle of hermeneutic worked with the idea that the will of God is timeless and must always remain timeless.¹⁶⁸ Orthodoxy therefore could not see that Scriptural revelation is historically conditioned. For a true appreciation of the historical character of revelation Kuitert refers to G. C. Berkouwer's work *De Heilige Schrift, volume 2*, and to his own work *De Realiteit van het Geloof*.

Another chapter has for its title "*De Taal van de Prediking*." In his chapter on this subject Kuitert deals again with the question how to make the gospel intelligible to modern man. This leads him again to relate his view to that of such men as Bultmann. We need, says Kuitert, a truly relevant reinterpretation of the gospel.¹⁶⁹ No more needs to be said here on this point.

We turn now to Kuitert's chapter on "*Herwaardering van de Dood*." H. Bavinck's work

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

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Gereformeerde Dogmatiek may, says Kuitert, serve as a model of the traditional view of death. According to Bavinck death as punishment for sin came into the world when Adam disobeyed the commandment of God.¹⁷⁰ In paradise there was no death.

It is obvious, says Kuitert, that we need a new reorientation with respect to the problem of death. The bottom has fallen out of the traditional scheme of creation, fall and redemption.¹⁷¹ A reorientation or reevaluation with respect to death involves, therefore, a reevaluation of the entire framework of theology as a whole.

Then, as far as the particular point is concerned Kuitert mentions the following:

Modern biology has shown that as there can be no death without life so there can be “no life without death.” A biologist cannot use the notion that there was “a time when there was no death.”¹⁷² We cannot permanently close our minds to the “increase of knowledge attained on this point.”

For present-day man death is therefore a less mythological entity than it formerly was.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 143.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

Philosophers, sociologists and theologians must, therefore deal with this phenomenon, not with some mythological entity.¹⁷⁴

What the New Testament teaches on the subject of death is not out of accord with the modern biologists' view of death. For Paul death is primarily an ethical, not a biological problem. For him death is gain (Phil 1:21). Thus for Paul the fact that men "must die" is a positive something.¹⁷⁵

Karl Barth has brought out Paul's meaning when he speaks of man's time as limited or restricted time (*befristete Zeit*). Such Roman Catholic thinkers as K. Rahner and others point up Paul's positive meaning of death by saying that man is man at his best when he gives up his past in order to become truly man in the future. And the most definitive manner in which man gives himself up is when he dies.¹⁷⁶ It is only thus, when man turns the necessity of dying into the act of self-denial, that he best completes himself.

Kuitert points out that this reevaluation of death on the part of Roman Catholic theologians resembles that of existentialist philosophers. True, he says, Heidegger's view is "secular"; but there are lines of connection between this Barthian Roman Catholic and existentialist view of death and what Reformation theologians teach on this subject.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Finally Kuitert indicates that this reevaluation of the traditional view of death has implications that go beyond the matter of the death of individual men. On the new view we may think of death “not only as a means of individual fulfilment but also ... as a task in the interest of those who come after us.” We serve the next generation by making room for them. “Non-Christians and Christians may undertake this task together.” They can together rejoice in every least bit of development in the direction of what is good in the world. “But the Christian may then in addition rejoice in the appearance of Jesus Christ who by his liberating work turns aside the interruption, which threatens development (our sin against God’s purpose is in fact regression).”¹⁷⁸

In a separate chapter on “*Moeten Sterven en de Dood*” Kuitert speaks of the new view as a “cultural reworking” of the traditional view of death.¹⁷⁹ Modern man reworks the necessity of dying. It is Barth who has shown us that the knowledge of the necessity of dying enables us as men to experience it as something unique.¹⁸⁰ Accordingly man should be satisfied with the necessity of death. A culture that conceives of death in this way may quite possibly fit in better with original Jewish-Christian thinking than that of the strongly mythological ages.”¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

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2. Kuitert's General Framework of Thought

We shall now take a look at Kuitert's position in general. We must seek to understand him in relation to the new hermeneutic. Kuitert agrees with Ebeling's statement to the effect that the problem of theology concentrates itself in hermeneutics. Not only does Kuitert agree with Ebeling about the importance of hermeneutics today but he also agrees basically with Ebeling on the nature of hermeneutics. Recent philosophy of language, says Kuitert, is on the right road when it says that Scripture speaks in language of ethical rather than intellectual relations. We must not understand Scriptural speech about God as "a thinking about God in more or less primitive-logical concepts." Throughout both the Old and the New Testament Scripture speaks in covenantal, i.e., in ethical terms. "The ethical connections, which constantly accompany the notion of teaching, show that the whole man (in the doing of his deeds) is throughout addressed."¹⁸²

All through the four books we are considering Kuitert makes the distinction between a mere intellectual, and a fully personal or ethical approach to biblical truth. Orthodox Christianity has, by and large, held to the former and modern Christianity has, by and large to the latter position. Of course, Kuitert's personal sympathies are with the orthodox Protestant and, more particularly with the Reformed Protestant view of biblical religion. But then Kuitert

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 191.

wants, apparently, to arouse his brethren from their dogmatic slumber, their static metaphysics.

A. Kuitert Addresses Reformed Theologians

We may imagine him addressing a group of them on his new vision of the ethical relation of man to God as they have rallied about the question how to challenge modern post-Kantian man with the Christ of the Scriptures. The venerable Herman Bavinck spoke first. He stressed the fact that the whole relation between God and man must be taken as ethical not metaphysical. "Here, precisely," said Bavinck, "the difference between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism is to be found. It is about sin through man's fall in Adam and salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, truly God and truly man, that we must speak to modern man."

"Yes," said Grosheide and Greydanus, as with one voice, "Bavinck gave us this vision when we were his students. That vision is based on Paul's theology. By his once-for-all sacrifice of himself in our place upon the cross Christ saved us from the wrath to come. We who hated God and our fellow men now, by the work of the Holy Spirit who takes the things of Christ and gives them unto us, love him and his kingdom above all else. All our exegetical work and all our hermeneutical writing proceeds from this basically ethical basis."

"Please, please," came a voice from an old man sitting in the rear. "Let me say a word. I taught all of you, even Herman, that it is the historical ethical approach of Calvinism that must underlie a true

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science, a true philosophy and a true theology. In my Stone Lectures at Princeton, New Jersey, I pointed out this fact as sharply as I could. B. B. Warfield and Geerhaardus Vos were in my audience. Both were in basic agreement with me. Vos had already written his inaugural address on *The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology*.”

It was the senior Kuyper speaking, old Abe, as his people loved to call him. Among the younger men present were de Graaf and Klaas Schilder. When Kuyper was out of breath both of them jumped up and asked for the floor. Kuitert recognized de Graaf first.

“Did I not write a large two volume work in which the ethical covenantal relation between God and man through Christ is the all-controlling motif? Its title, in case you haven’t heard about it, is *Verbondsgeschiedenis*.” When de Graaf sat down Schilder called out: “Did not I write a three-volume work on *The Christ and His Suffering* in which the covenant theme is all-controlling? Did I not write *What is Heaven* in which I set off the truly biblical notion of God’s historical dealings with man from the modern, man-centered views of origins and eschatology? Did I not in my elaborate exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism center everything about the covenantal relation of man to God. ‘Everything is covenant-dating’ I said. This was the theme of the entire work.”

When silence fell Kuitert spoke in reply to his traditional Reformed predecessors. He divided what he had to say in two parts, one negative and one

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positive. The negative part was, of course, to the effect that all theology of the past had been based on a dualistic metaphysic. The positive part was, of course, to the effect that with the great discovery of the historical consciousness modern theology can, for the first time provide an intelligible account of the covenantal idea of God as through Christ in communion with man and of man as through Christ in communion with God.

Kuitert spoke: My dear friends, you have all done a noble work of God in and for your day and generation. But in the nature of the case, you worked with the conceptual apparatus of your day. You thought of God as eternal and unchangeable in his being and attributes. You thought of man as temporal and changeable in his being and attributes. You thought of Jesus Christ as changelessly eternal in his divine nature and as changingly temporal in his human nature. There was no intelligible relation between God and man at any point. *Hinc illae lacrimae.*

May I be so bold as to illustrate? In your day, Dr. Kuyper, you spoke with great eloquence of the sovereignty of God. Only your “regenerate” people had a vision of it. But what happened to them when they received the vision? They were blinded by it; they no longer had eyes of their own. They said they were the image-bearers of God, that is to say, they thought of themselves as puppets. At the same time they became intolerably proud, over against other Christians as well as over against men in general. To become a member of the Reformed churches in your day one had to become militantly anti-

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humanistic, anti-Roman Catholic, anti-this and anti-that. You even had a twofold science, one based on regeneration and one based on the principle of apostate man. You pictured your apostate man as fallen in Adam and as not redeemed by Christ. Fallen men were said to hate God and their neighbor. They used even their science in order to repress the revelation of God within and about them. They sinned against their own better knowledge.

Such was your much celebrated teaching with respect to the antithesis which sprang from your view of the sovereignty of God, which sprang from your static metaphysics.

In your Stone Lectures at Princeton you set forth your positive program based on this principle of antithesis: Calvinism in science, Calvinism in Art, Calvinism in Politics, Calvinism in History, Calvinism in Religion. At the end of your last address you expressed the hope that in days to come Calvinism would be recognized all over the land as the great benefactor of the race.

But all this was before the time of the great discovery of the historical consciousness. It is only in terms of this magnificent discovery that we really understand the true nature of God and the true nature of man as, in their very nature, related to one another in the Christ-Event. God's sovereignty no longer displays itself at the expense of the freedom of man. On the contrary, this sovereignty displays itself in the development of the sovereignty of man. There is, therefore, no longer any basic antithesis

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such as you visualized. As Calvinists, or rather as Christians of the Reformed tradition, we join hand in hand with all Christians, especially with neo-orthodox Christians in all fields in raising the Christ-Event on high as a common banner.

When Kuitert had done, Kuyper seemed to be stupefied. He did not get the full significance of it all. However, he seemed to realize that Kuitert was trying to wipe out the border-line between belief and unbelief as this has been understood in the past, not only by Calvinists, but also by all “evangelical” Christians. All the venerable old man was heard to say was: “And are you now teaching at the university I founded?”

(1) The Ethical as the Non-Intellectual

Then Kuitert turned to Bavinck: As for you Dr. Bavinck, I am delighted by the fact that you spoke of the principle of the Reformation as being ethical rather than metaphysical. As you know I have been appointed to teach ethics at the Free University. I wish you could see how we express this matter of the ethical character of the Reformation and of Christianity today. I have given some indication as to how I propose to tackle the matter in my inaugural address on Social Ethics and Faith in Jesus Christ given on November 17, 1967.¹⁸³ For us today ethics is no longer based upon a set of intellectually stated doctrines such as you worked out in your great work on *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*. Kant has shown us once for all that if we are to have a person

¹⁸³ Harminus Martinus Kuitert, *Social Ethiek en Geloof in Jezus Christus* (Kampen: J. H. Kok 1967.)

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to person relation with God then this relation must be ethical, in a non-intellectual sense of conceptual relationships between persons exist at the expense of the freedom of these persons. And without freedom there can be no true love.

Kant has shown once and for all that we can know, (i.e., conceptually apprehend), nothing about God. As free and sovereign, God cannot reveal himself to man in any conceptual form of statement without losing his self-identity as a sovereign person. The whole of the Bible is full of the idea that God has and, we may even say, consists in covenant communication with man and that man has and, consists in covenant communication with God.

You see Dr. Bavinck, that thinking of the matter in this way implies that ethics is not an addendum to doctrine, but is doctrine. I am sure you would rewrite your whole work on Dogmatics if you were with us in the phenomenal realm today. Today ethics cannot be written as your colleague Dr. W. Geesink wrote his *Gereformeerde Ethiek*. I am sure that today Kuyper, Geesink, and you would agree that the idea of a once-for-all finished revelation of the will of an eternally self-existent God in Scripture as an absolute norm for human behavior is an intellectualistic, and therefore unethical, notion. I myself am starting from tradition as a true ethical notion of the person-to-person relation between God and man. I then weave the idea of a scriptural canon into notion of the ongoing or progressive revelation of God in and with man.

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You no doubt remember how in the latter days of your stay in the phenomenal realm there was much ado about the possibility of the construction of a new confession for the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands. If I remember correctly, you were yourself involved in the discussion of this subject. We have had something similar come up in our general synod. On October 31, 1969 our synod reminded the churches of the fact that the so-called “three forms of unity,” i.e., our church confessions, have a binding character. This sounds as though it came from your day. However on the basis of the new discovery of the historical consciousness, and the idea of the I-thou dimension of communication, the idea of a binding confession is obsolete. In your day a confession was composed of a series of intellectual statements meant to reproduce a divine revelation also given in intellectual statements.

Well, our recent synod has apparently seen something of what a confession should be like today. A confession should express the faith in a truly free, untrammelled relationship between God and man in terms of the Christ-Event.

I just wrote a short article on “must we have a new confession” in a small magazine called *Voorlopie*.¹⁸⁴ In this article I point out that the synod itself wants a confession in the language of our time. I suppose we might say that the old confessions must be demythologized, i.e., deintellectualized and ethicized, or personalized. Only then can they

¹⁸⁴ Harminus Martinus Kuitert, “*moeten we een nieuwe belijdenis hebben*,” *Voorlopie*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Februari 1970), pp. 56–59.

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suggest something of the covenant-interaction of biblical religion.

We who are among the younger theologians stress the fact that we misunderstand the significance of the idea of Scriptural revelation unless we ask what the purpose of this revelation is. In his recent work *The Holy Scripture* Dr. Berkouwer already stresses this truth.¹⁸⁵ We must look back of the letter of Scripture to the matter, *die Sache* which God is concerned to reveal to us in Scripture. This matter is that of the covenantal relationship of God with man in the Christ-Event. Just to say that something is true because it is found in Scripture—*in de Bijbel staat*—is to have a faith of the sort Mohammedans have.

(2) The Content and the Packing

We must therefore distinguish between the real, intention of God's communication with man expressed in Scripture, and the language of the culture in which this content comes to us. The latter is the packing in which the matter or content is conveyed to us. This process of distinguishing between the content of revelation and its packaging is a sort of demythologization. But of course, all demythologizing is carried on in the interest of drawing out of Scripture the true, existential interpretation needed by twentieth-century man.

Now I am applying a similar process of demythologizing and existential interpretation to our

¹⁸⁵ Gerrit Cornelius Berkouwer, *De Heilige Schrift*, 2 volumes (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1966–67.)

confessions, our “three formulas of unity.” What I am after is a new confession, a confession that will express our present-day ethical view of the relation of God to man. Of course even at our recent synod there were many delegates to synod who still think in old-fashioned metaphysical, intellectualist terms. These men did not see that a new confession for today must not merely repeat an intellectualist statement of the gospel, *mit ein bisschen andern Worten*. A new confession must express what the gospel means to us who think in person-to-person, i.e, ethical, rather than intellectual notions. Only then can our confessions become truly ecumenical, and serve as a bond of unity for all Christians.

The Confession of 1967 of the United Presbyterian Church in America has gone a long way in the right direction. Its composers rightly saw that God is God only as he is operative for our redemption in history.

Many men of good will in many churches other than the Reformed today work with us on the basis of the “great discovery” I have spoken of.

It may even be impossible today to express the unity of Christians in the form of a confession at all. I am sure, Dr. Bavinck, that with your irenic spirit, and with your oft-asserted statement that *omnia abeunt in mysterium* you would feel at one with our effort today. We seek to be modest as you were modest. We believe in ultimate contingency as the source of the mystery enveloping God and man. I know you didn’t believe many such mystery. You did not believe that mystery surrounded God as well

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as man. We believed with you on this point till Kant and his followers opened our eyes to see that ultimate contingency is just what is needed for the really free, i.e., interpersonal, intercourse between our covenant God and us in the Christ-Event.

When Kuitert stopped speaking Bavinck did not reply; he simply shook his head.

Kuitert next addressed Dr. Grosheide and Dr. S. Greydanus: You two gentlemen would really have the thrill of your life if you could do your hermeneutical work in my day with its vision of the historical consciousness. One of your admirers says that the historical consciousness dawned upon mankind when Adam, at the instigation of Satan, rebelled against God. It was then, this man says, that man declared his autonomy, or freedom from the law of God. It was then, this man adds, that man developed the idea that rationality or coherence must spring from himself. It was then that man posited the idea that pure contingency and mystery surrounds God as well as himself.

But all this is untrue and meaningless. If there is anything of particular value in the work that Emil Brunner has done, it is to show us that to think of an historical Adam and of his fall as the reason for human misbehavior in general is to reduce the ethical relationship between God and man to a merely physical one.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ Harminus Martinus Kuitert, *Kroniek Gereformeerde Theologisch Tydschrift* (1966), p. 114. Brunner's book *Our Faith*, says Kuitert, has, humanly speaking, "kept numberless people in the faith."

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As I said a while ago when talking to Dr. Bavinck, it was Kant who really introduced us to the truly ethical view of the relation of God to man.

In his *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant showed us that we can have no knowledge, i.e., conceptual knowledge, of God. Knowledge is limited to the phenomenal world, to the I-it dimension, to the field of science. In limiting knowledge to the phenomenal, Kant made room for faith. True faith, Kant has shown us, does not have for its object a self-existing, all-ordaining God. A true God must be truly transcendent above all that man can say about him conceptually; for this reason we must believe in him rather than try to know him.

The man of whom I was speaking says that on Kant's view, faith is faith in faith; its "object," he says, is only a projection of man's own ideals into a featureless world of pure indeterminateness. But we may ignore this sort of thing.

In his *Critique of Practical Reason* and in his *Critique of Judgment* Kant pointed out the fact that there is such a thing as coming into touch with God. By our practical reason we project an idea of God as Creator, and director of the universe. It is this God who is what he is for us men and for our salvation; and we men are what we are because we respond to this God as our ideal.

The notion of *Verstehen* as used by recent existentialist philosophers and theologians has its background in Kant's "practical reason." Richard Kroner speaks of the primacy of this practical

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reason. By means of it we can now say that though we can intellectually discover no purpose in the world about us at all, yet we may believe that all will be well with us.

But let me go on to Schleiermacher. Just as we learned for the first time what *Verstehen* and faith really are from Kant, so we learned for the first time what real personal dependence on God really means from Schleiermacher. On the intellectualist view, the view which has prevailed till now among us, absolute dependence meant the absolute loss of freedom. But Schleiermacher has shown that our absolute sense of dependence presupposes absolute freedom. Of course there are people who simply reject Schleiermacher as having introduced subjectivism into theology (*Schleiermacher en dus fout*).¹⁸⁷ From the traditional, intellectualist point of view this is all one really can say. Schleiermacher follows Kant in rejecting all supposedly “objective” knowledge of God by means of natural theology or by directly identifiable revelation of God in history.

But real religion is, for Schleiermacher, not a matter of doctrine. I’ll quote myself on this: “It is not a matter of holding to doctrine or ethic but it is something that belongs to the sector of immediate self-consciousness.”¹⁸⁸ The sense of absolute dependence is an absolutely original awareness. This original awareness of dependence is, for Schleiermacher, identical with the experience of God.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 65 (1965), p. 134.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

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(3) Gerhard Ebeling on Faith

It is this identification of the experience or awareness of God with our sense of absolute dependence on the part of Schleiermacher that makes us realize that modern existential theology goes back to him. Similarly, “Ebeling, Fuchs, Robinson etc.—however different as theologians they may be among themselves—are unthinkable without Schleiermacher.” Just read Ebeling’s book *The Essence of Christian Faith (Wesen des Christlichen Glaubens)* and you will sense at once his dependence on Schleiermacher.¹⁸⁹ “When we hear Ebeling say that the Christian Faith must not be taken as a dogmatic formula but as a ‘coming to expression,’ *zur Sprache kommen*, of faith (in the sense of experience of being founded, *Gegrundet-sein*, we recognize—again—that Schleiermacher was his model.”¹⁹⁰

Now, I realize that to say what Ebeling says is not enough. We must believe in the crucified and risen Lord as the solid ground of our faith. And Schleiermacher wouldn’t agree with us in saying this. And we, in turn, cannot accept Schleiermacher’s basic position. But certainly, we may all learn much from him.¹⁹¹

But I must not detain you. Let me say just a word about the recent hermeneutic on the basis of the

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 135–136.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

work I did in my dissertation on *De Mensvormigheid Gods*. I am especially interested in Ebeling.

On the basis of the work of Kant, Schleiermacher, Barth and Bultmann, Ebeling thinks he is able to work out the meaning of the Christian Faith in a marvelous way. He has shown us how to present the Christian Faith to its cultured despisers so that they can accept it without making any sacrifice of the intellect. Orthodox believers used to be much concerned about, if not exercised by, the problem of “higher” criticism. The problem of how to harmonize the Genesis account with recent evolutionary theory was an ever-disturbing problem for them. Ebeling has no problems. He assigns “criticism” its proper place and lets science go its way. After all if the Christian Faith is not a matter of doctrine at all, in the traditional sense of the term, then Faith is free. Man is then free and therefore Faith is free. What shall we say of all this?

Recent language philosophy, working on the same post-Kantian view of man and the world, has helped to develop a new hermeneutic. The men of the language philosophy are walking “in the right way.”¹⁹²

The Scriptures do not speak of a God as such but of God “as known by Israel.” “This means negatively that we must definitely not understand this speaking of God as a thinking about God, in more or less primitive concepts.”¹⁹³ You may see what I mean by reading that “fascinating chapter on ‘Jesus and Faith’

¹⁹² Kuitert, *De Mensvormigheid Gods*, p. 289.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

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(*Jesus and Glaube*) of G. Ebeling in *Word and Faith (Wort und Glaube)* 203ff. on the relationship of faith to God's historical acting and speaking."¹⁹⁴ The traditional notion of faith as having intellectual content for its object hides the matter completely. If we are to appreciate the true function of the language of Scripture, as speaking of the covenantal communion of God with man, then we must adopt as our "ground-rule" that every notion of intellectual content must be excluded.¹⁹⁵

We may and must, to be sure, speak of a content of knowledge, (*kennisinhoud*). This knowledge-content is, however, "meant for practical use." Only thus can we understand the intention of the Scriptural writers.¹⁹⁶

You will see, my friends, that working with the intellectualist methodology of the past, your hermeneutic was not able to do justice to the *kerygma* in its uniqueness. We must therefore follow the new approach introduced by Kant. Of course, we must not use this new approach uncritically. Thus Bultmann goes too far. His demythologizing process also ends up in a "reduction of the *Kerygma*."¹⁹⁷ Existentialist theology was right in its rejection of the traditional view of the relation of God and man, based as this was on the idea of the abstract eternity of God. However, in rejecting the traditional metaphysical view it based its own

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, note 72. "*Der Glaube hat es nicht mit Ungeschichtlichem, Zeitlos-Allgemeinen zu tun ... Glaube in at-lichen Sinne heiszt nicht: etwas über Gott denken, sondern: etwas von Gott erwarten.*"

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

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thinking on the notion of Time as the basic characteristic of all reality. This involved the idea that man is quite intelligible in himself, and that reality is what man, as self-referential, says that it is. Interpreted exclusively in terms of such a view of man theology is anthropologized.¹⁹⁸

We must therefore, my friends, leave behind the traditional intellectualist method of hermeneutics. I repeat: The modern theologians are working in the right direction. We must follow them, but not all the way into subjectivism.

When Kuitert again fell silent Greydanus and Grosheide looked at one another but did not say a word. Meanwhile Schilder was moving about uneasily on his chair. But before he could say a word Kuitert turned to him and said:

As for you, K. S., I know why you are so restless. I know what you want to say. You want to say that I have lost my footing in the objective revelation of God on Scripture entirely. You were largely instrumental in removing Dr. Geelkerken from the church at the synod of Assen in 1926. No doubt you would like to remove me now. And you are right, from your rigorously intellectualist point of view. I have indeed gone much further with the modern hermeneutical approach than Geelkerken had in his day. I am no longer interested in saving the ordinary historicity of the Genesis account. Geelkerken only saw the rich clusters of grapes in the promised land but did not taste their sweetness. He did not sense the true nature of faith as freedom from all

¹⁹⁸ Kuitert, *De Realiteit van het geloof*, p. 152.

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supposedly objective, i.e., phenomenological, reference.

You will, however, not succeed in removing me from the church. Several of my colleagues and I have written a series of pamphlets to prepare the church people for the new, enlightened principle of hermeneutics we are introducing. My pamphlet, *Do You Understand What You Read*, is one of those. In it I have shown into what fantastic absurdities we fall if we hold fast to a supposedly objective revelation, as you speak of it. The old view of Scripture was biblicistic, and fundamentalistic.

What interests me especially in your own case is that your method is, for all its vaunted orthodoxy, essentially identical with that of a man like Ritschl who is surely an arch-modernist on your view. May I quote from my dissertation on this point: "Schilder and Ritschl alike reason from an already determined view of what God can and cannot do. The *simplicitas Dei* (conceived of by Schilder in such a way that it excludes all before and after in God, and therefore with it all speaking of affections), is for Schilder the controlling point of view. Only thus can the sovereignty of God be maintained, and the preaching of this sovereignty of God is the main point for him."¹⁹⁹

When I wrote this, I asked you by what right do you distinguish among those ways of speaking of God in Scripture which must be taken at face value,

¹⁹⁹ Kuitert, *De Mensvormigheid Gods*, p. 21.

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and other ways of speaking of God in Scripture which must not.

I also said that your method of reasoning and that of Ritschl look as much alike as two drops of water.²⁰⁰ You, as well as Ritschl, approach Scripture with preconceived notions about God. This is not a proper hermeneutical approach to Scripture.

I may illustrate the fatal weakness of your method from the criticism you made of Barth earlier. I refer to what you said in your dissertation on *Zur Begriffsgeschichte des Paradoxon*.

You assert that Barth derives his concept of revelation by a speculative rather than an exegetical method. You do not like Barth's idea of a dialectical relation between the revealedness and the hiddenness of God. Over against Barth you maintain that God in Christ restores rather than destroys our laws of thought. You hold Barth's view of revelation to be irrationalistic. You claim that Calvin's approach was quite otherwise than that of Barth. According to Calvin, you assert, revelation is put into relation with and manifests itself in the process and progress of history. "It would, accordingly, be better not to speak of revelation, but of *historia revelationis* as an ongoing unlocking of the decree of God."²⁰¹ But, I ask you, is it not this same notion of God's transcendence as indicating a qualitative difference between God and man that underlies both Barth's and Calvin's theology?²⁰² When Barth speaks of the

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 110.

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Worldliness (*Welthaftigkeit*) as a form of revelation and you speak of the accommodation of God's revelation you may not quite be saying the same thing, but you speak from the same background. This background stems from the idea that there is in God an essence far above and abstract from his revelation. You do not discern the duality between the essence and the revelation of God. This is the best proof that you share your startingpoint with your opponent.²⁰³

Throughout my dissertation I have used your philosophically conceived notion of the sovereignty of God, and all it entails of a false problematics, as the best possible illustration (*schoolvoorbeeld*) of the fact that we can no longer follow the traditional hermeneutic.

I am sorry that I had to be so negative in your case. Your rigorous biblical objectivism left me no choice. However, I think that if you were with us today you too would see the evil of the divisiveness that is involved in the traditional view. For, to be honest, I must admit, that though you have exhibited this divisiveness more than many others have, their static categories were not really any better than yours. I therefore, urge all of you to follow me as I follow the modern hermeneutics. Then we will all believe in Jesus and quarrel less and less with our modern brethren about our concepts about Jesus. The Christ-Event will unite us all.

B. Evaluation of Kuitert's Views

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

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We come now, at last, to our own estimation of Kuitert's general theological position. Kuitert wrote his first major work in the interest of liberating his orthodox brethren from their ill-starred adherence to a God-in-himself and a man-in-himself to an acceptance of a God who is God as God-for-man and a man who is what he is as man-for-God in terms of the Christ-Event. It was the "great discovery" of the historical consciousness that led him to this *pro-me* theology. Kuitert assumes that the biblical idea of the covenant between God and man can now at last, as never before, be understood for what it really is. Now at last we can see that the whole of God's being is expressed in his covenantal purpose with man. The idea of a plan or purpose of a God whose essence is not identical with his revelation would be an abstraction. Similarly the idea of a man who must realize his purposes within such a plan is also an abstraction. A God who is sovereign over the world and man in terms of a pre-temporal all-inclusive plan for all the eventuality of the world would be a God of whom no man could have any "understanding." Such a God would be identical with the abstract speculative notion of unchangeability.²⁰⁴ All of history, including the decisions of man, would be like a puppet-dance. We must learn to see that the unchange-ability of a truly sovereign God is identical with the principle of constancy in history.²⁰⁵ Only in thus historicizing God can we escape the "insoluble contradictions" with which traditional theologians have struggled in vain all their lives.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

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The abstract notion of a God-in-himself with an absolute decree according to which all things in history must be what they will be involves an equally abstract notion of revelation and its codification in Scriptures. Revelation becomes the expression of a series of static intellectual statements giving information about a changeless, predetermined situation.

(1) Kuitert's "Great Discovery"

This orthodox view of a God-in-himself, who tells an eternally chosen group of people about their favored position and determines in advance the "good" works they will do, would make nonsense of ethics as well as of a proper view of knowing and of being. We would be nothing but puppets, we would know nothing that we could in any sense understand, and we could decide nothing that had not been decided about us and for us.

All the evil in the world would have to be what it is and, with the best will in the world we (ourselves evil by God's decree) would be able to do nothing for the relief of mankind. Our own wickedness, of which we are so deeply aware, would be indelible. John Wesley was right when in his sermon against Predestination he apostrophized Satan, telling him that God is infinitely more efficient in sending people to hell than he, and infinitely more wicked than he in doing so.

But now all this has changed. Using the great modern discovery of the historical consciousness as our spectacles we see that no such absolute,

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changeless God in himself, with an absolute decree, can exist. Kant has shown us that we could know nothing of such a God. Such a God could not communicate with us in language that we could understand in any sense. We would be unable to identify ourselves as individual persons or as over against the non-personal objects of this world. Such a God would treat us human persons as things, objects to be handled at will.

Of course, in saying that we know nothing of such a God, we do not mean to suggest that we know anything about any other sort of God. But we believe in another sort of God this believing is, for us, the same as understanding (*Verstehen*) in a deeper and broader sense than the understanding of conceptual knowledge. We now mean by believing or *Verstehen* what Kant meant when he spoke of having a limiting notion about God, the soul, and immortality. The great modern discovery of the historical consciousness builds upon the Kantian distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal world. Today men speak of the former as the I-it and of the latter as the I-thou dimension. As a person I am with God, living in the noumenal world of Kant, i.e., in the I-thou dimension of recent existentialist philosophy.. I am a non-objectifiable ego. Orthodox theology has tried to depersonalize or objectivize me, At last we are free. We now know, i.e., we believe (*Verstehen*), that as persons we are free from an all-determining fate and free unto an absolutely open future.

(2) Kuitert on the Liberty Train to Sartre

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However, Kuitert's enthusiasm wanes when he goes further and further down the road with those who build a *pro me* theology with the flag of the historical consciousness held high before them. The railroad of the historical consciousness goes down an ever steeper grade and sometimes the brakes do not seem to hold. Toward the end he seems to realize, at least to some extent, that he must "get off the tram" before the last stop. But can he? He begins to see that the "freedom" allowed him on the liberty train of modern theology is the freedom not to get off and on the train when he pleases but to move from the front to the back and from the back to the front inside the train.

At the beginning Kuitert felt greatly oppressed by the logical "contradictions" involved in the historic Reformed view. How could man have the freedom necessary for his sense of responsibility on the traditional view of man as, of necessity, thinking and acting within an all-controlling plan of God? To turn to Roman Catholicism or to Arminianism would give him no help. It would, in fact, mark retrogression. We must have the Reformed notion of a God of sovereign freedom.

On the traditional view only darkness lies ahead. One must cling to the God of sovereign grace even at the price of a *sacrificium intellectus*. To have the God of sovereign grace one must take a Bible full of logical and factual contradiction into the bargain.

But all this was darkness and suddenly the light dawns. The God of sovereign grace does not prosper in his ways unless his creatures are as free

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as he. Kant has shown us this. Man can really express his absolute dependence on God if he has absolute freedom. Schleiermacher has shown us this. Christ is truly God as well as truly man only if, in him, God turns wholly into the opposite of himself downward; and if in him, man participates in his very aseity upward. Barth has shown us this.

All is cooperation now. Modern scientists and the philosophers are highly pleased with our acceptance of the historical consciousness as our mother of God. They watch with deep inward approval as they see us use their principle of human autonomy for our starting point, their principle of pure contingency as our basis for the uniqueness of Christ, and their principle of pure rationality as our basis for our understanding of the universality of Christ's person and work.

But the darkness of Chaos and old night envelops the train and its occupants.

(3) The Lights Go Out—Is the Battery Dead?

The lights inside the car go out and no supply of fuel for heat is available. If ever man were man in himself and if ever God were God in himself that time is now. God is, to be sure, also on the train; he is very near to men. In fact he is being with man. But in his being with man, he is, with man, emerging from nothingness and with man sliding back into nothingness. As a thinking thing God has to think of nothingness acting destructively upon pure thought thinking itself as the source of his individual "existence"; and of pure thought thinking itself acting

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destructively upon pure contingency as the source of his understanding of himself.

As for the Christ-Event, it is the intersecting point between abstract universality and abstract particularly somehow attached to Jesus of Nazareth. The uniqueness of Jesus is postulated as being a greater uniqueness than that of other men and the universality of Jesus is said to be more universal than is the universality of other men.

There is no evidence in Kuitert's writings that, to some extent he senses the destructive nature of modern hermeneutics, whether in science, in philosophy or in theology. He jumped on the liberty train built by the historical consciousness with great glee. It seemed so wonderful to be able to repeat after Barth that God is both wholly revealed and wholly hidden. It seemed so wonderful to have a *sturmfreies Gebiet* for the Christian faith. Did not Barth tell us that if only we start from the idea of the Christ-Event, i.e., Christ as *Geschichte* instead of Christ as *Historie*, then we can drop all problems of harmonization of aspects of Bible teaching? In *The Reality of Faith* Kuitert begins to worry as to where the "liberty train" he is on will lead him. He even goes so far as to say that the modern existential notion of man and his freedom, i.e., the modern freedom-nature scheme, appears to him to be more "Greek philosophical than Christian."²⁰⁶ Kuitert is at last beginning to realize that the "nature of the subject," i.e., the nature of man, is in dispute between Christianity and existentialism.²⁰⁷ "The

²⁰⁶ Kuitert, *De Realiteit van het geloof*, p. 152.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

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subject from which existential theology presupposes is the subject which posits itself; a subject which can, in the last analysis, maintain itself as subject only by separating itself, that is to say, by isolating itself in order to save itself.”²⁰⁸

Kuitert sees the spectre of the God-is-dead theology before him. “Here I have been so mercilessly criticizing Kuyper and his dogmatic descendents for making God into a predicate of a creature. With what enthusiasm did I urge everybody to escape from this nemesis by jumping on the Liberty-train of modern theology. In this theology we were to hear God himself speaking to us within ourselves. We were to ‘understand’ the ‘uniqueness of Christ’ better than it had ever been understood before. And now, I cannot away with the spectre of Feuerbach.”²⁰⁹

One would have thought that at this point Kuitert would have left the train and returned to the God and the Christ of the Reformers. In the beginning Kuitert wanted simply to do more justice to the place of man, i.e., to the subject, in the correlation between God and man than had been given him in traditional theology. At that time he seemed to think that the modern *pro-me* theologians were seeking to do the same thing.

When modern theologians took the “findings” of historical criticism at face value and employed the historical critical method to the text of Scripture they were, in the eyes of Kuitert, at this time, aiming at

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

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the same thing that he was aiming at. They as well as he, Kuitert thought, wanted to make the message of the Gospel intelligible to modern man.

But now that Kuitert has been on the Liberty-train for some time he begins to wonder whether he can altogether trust the railroad company that has laid the rails and the engineers that are running the train. In fact, he begins to panic. As he listens to the lectures by Fuchs and Ebeling on the train he begins to realize that they will accept nothing as revelation except that which in their full freedom they can accept as such, i.e., in their full autonomy (*freie Ausserung*).²¹⁰

What's going to happen to Christ and his resurrection on this view of the self-postulating self?

Fuchs seems to be right from his point of view when in the name of the authority of the historical consciousness he rejects what Paul says in the first few verses of 1 Corinthians 15 about the resurrection appearances of Christ. 1 Cor 15 The notion of reality that finds its expression in the idea of the historical consciousness cannot allow for the direct identification of resurrection appearances in the phenomenal world.²¹¹

But how can I accept the view of reality that Fuchs presents with its unqualified denial of the direct presence of God-in-Christ in the world of the I-it dimension and at the same time hold on to the idea of the transition from wrath to grace in history

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

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without which I remain under the wrath of God?²¹² When I first heard Barth proclaim that the real Resurrection was not in *Historie* but in *Geschichte* I was fascinated. On Barth's view of the Christ as *Geschichte* all our problems with respect to the inconsistencies in the text of the gospels seemed to be solved. They pertain merely to the I-it dimension of reality. The steps of Christ's humiliation and the steps of his exaltation did not really follow one another on the calendar. All these steps were to stand before us simultaneously in the Present. What was past in the calendar sense of the term, and what will be future in the calendar sense of the term can, at most, said Barth, be pointers to what is truly Present, present in the realm of person-to-person confrontation.

But now, I shudder to think, when I seem to see that existential philosophy is trying to express the Christian message of salvation in terms of a modern philosophical thought apparatus.²¹³

I now see that in his hermeneutic Ebeling, following Barth, insists that "faith can call nothing real except that which it can bring to expression as being present *gegenwartig*."²¹⁴ "Existential philosophy has defined man strictly in the sense that from the idea of being man, the nature—the what—of salvation is decided in advance."²¹⁵ The hermeneutical procedure of existential theology can produce as its result only that which its view of man

²¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 111–112.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

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had put into it at the beginning. Only that is and can be real which man can understand (*Verstehen*).²¹⁶ “The reality of faith is faith itself in its authentic happening.”²¹⁷

One would think that at this point Kuitert would leave the train. He sees that the existentialist hermeneutic of such men as Fuchs and Ebeling leads to the idea that the object of faith is faith itself, faith in man as capable of effecting his own salvation. Yet he speaks of the modern existential hermeneutic merely as a “reduction” not a rejection of the gospel. He does not even express a desire to leave the train. Does he still not see that the theology of the Reformation on which he was nurtured and the theology of modern hermeneutical theory are mutually exclusive of one another?

(4) Kuitert’s Despair

Kuitert asks himself what he is to do now. Existential theologians are leading us into a theology based on a false notion of man and of human freedom. Shall we then return to “metaphysical theology?” That is impossible.²¹⁸

Of the two positions, the position of metaphysical theology and the position of modern theology, Kuitert prefers the second. The Aristotelian view of science and of philosophy inherent in traditionalistic theology is obviously deterministic and rationalistic. Modern philosophical theories are more

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

experiential. We cannot “write a timeless dogmatics.”²¹⁹ We must argue with the modern rejection of Aristotelian staticism. We must even agree to an extent with the positive claims of the modern view. We agree with the modern view of making hermeneutics central in its interest. “A theology which wants to be a Scriptural theology—and what else does a Reformational theology desire to be—can only accept this with great gratitude.”²²⁰

We must appreciate the fact that modern hermeneutic has placed Scriptures in the center of interest again. Nor can we object against the intention of modern theologians to start their interpretative efforts from the place the human subject occupies in interpretation. As already indicated our difficulty with modern hermeneutic methodology is with the nature of the self it entertains, and with the nature of reality that is involved in this self.²²¹

However, if Kuitert had really sensed the significance of the modern, post-Kantian view of the human self and of the view of reality involved in it, he would have jumped off the train at once. He would have realized that on the mode view of the self and its world, historic Christianity, and the theology of the Reformers, is unintelligible and irrelevant to man. Jean-Paul Sartre expresses the modern position well when he says that the self is not a true self unless it is absolutely free from everything that the existence and work of God and

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 153–154.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

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his work in the world implies. Man is not responsible for his acts unless they proceed, in the most unrestricted sense, from himself.

By thus assuming man's ultimate autonomy, Sartre is asserting the ultimate questionableness of all reality. The subject has sprung from pure contingency and can know itself for what it is as a self-responsible being only when surrounded by pure contingency. But Sartre's subject, for all its freedom, implies a universal negative judgment about the realm of which, on its view, no one can say anything. Sartre says that God cannot exist. "What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence?" asks Sartre. "We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world—and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after already existing—as he wills to be after that leap toward existence. Man is nothing else but that which he makes himself. That is the first principle of existentialism."²²²

This is as good a description as one can find of the last station of the principle of the historicity of existence. According to this principle human

²²²Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism* quoted by Morton White, *The Age of Analysis* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1955), p. 124.

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consciousness emerges from an infinite ocean of chance. When it springs into existence it wonders why anything at all exists. According to modern process philosophy, a genuine working principle of hermeneutics needs this absolute openness for the future. The calendar distinction between past and future are merely surface pointers in the I-it dimension of man's experience, of the deeper freedom from space and time that man experiences in the I-thou dimension.

Then at the same time though man simply is as pure existence, i.e., as pure questionableness, he has within himself the final answer to the nature of reality. He knows what reality cannot possibly be; it cannot be what the God in the Bible says it is; it must therefore be what man sprung from chance says it must be. Pure determinism and pure indeterminism must together, as correlative to one another, tell us what man and his view of reality are. Kuitert together with other Christ-Event passengers are on their way to this last station; some of them may not be altogether happy with what they think of as Sartre's extreme position but they are helpers. Unless by the grace of God they are taken off this train they are headed for destruction.

One wonders why Kuitert did not see this basic significance of the modern idea of the historical consciousness at the beginning. One wonders whether it was because he was blind to the implication of the modern view of man and the world as he interprets them, that he so grievously misinterpreted the nature of Reformation thinking. In his first book Kuitert speaks as though such

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outstanding Reformed theologians as Kuyper, Bavinck and Schilder were basically controlled in the statement of their theological position by scholastic philosophy. This is a grievous misinterpretation of the work of these men. To be sure, some of them were to a larger or smaller extent influenced by scholasticism. The present writer as well as several others have pointed this out with respect to Kuyper, Bavinck and Hepp. But the scholasticism of these men merely constitutes an inconsistent left-over in their thought. The theological “systems” of these men were fundamentally based on the simple exegesis of Scripture as the direct revelation of God to man. Some scholasticism no doubt penetrated their exegesis. Even so the main principles of their hermeneutic were taken from Scripture. The principles of the hermeneutic of these men are diametrically opposed to the principles of the hermeneutic of scholastic theology. Scholastic theology took Greek hermeneutics or methodology for its model. Aquinas does this openly and frankly. With the help of the Greek form-matter scheme Aquinas builds his elaborate natural theology. What the Bible teaches about the triune God of Scripture as the Creator-redeemer of men is accommodated to the Greek form-matter scheme.

Apparently Kuitert did not see the difference between a basically exegetical approach to Scripture, such as is found in Calvin; and a basically speculative approach to Scripture, such as is found in Thomas Aquinas.

If Kuitert had seen the basic difference between these two then he would likely not have failed to see

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that the modern freedom-nature scheme is basically similar to the Greek form-matter scheme. Both have essentially the same view of man, the same view of pure contingency as the principle of individuation and the same view of pure abstract logic as the principle of unity in reality. If Kuitert had only seen that in the Greek form-matter scheme we have man, fallen in Adam, follow the example of Adam in declaring his independence from God, therewith denying that the revelation of his covenant God is everywhere before him. The Greek thinkers, like all fallen mankind, were covenant-breakers. If Kuitert had seen this then he might also have seen that in the modern freedom-nature scheme man, the covenant-breaker, is still constructing a philosophy of reality for himself in order to repress God's claims upon his love.

(5) Kuitert's Basic Misalignments

In short Kuitert has two basic misunderstandings of the covenant relation between God and man. Accordingly he makes a basically mistaken alignment between Reformation thinking and the form-matter scheme of Aristotle. These should have been presented as mutually opposed to one another. Secondly Kuitert makes a basically mistaken alignment between Reformation thinking and the freedom-nature scheme of post-Kantian thinking. These should also have been presented as mutually opposed to one another.

If Kuitert had seen the basic alignments for what they are, he would have pictured Reformation thinking as basically true to the convenantal principle

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of Scripture and as always challenging the thinking of the would-be autonomous man, as found in the Greek form-matter scheme and as found in the modern freedom-nature scheme.

As it is Kuitert does not appear to have Augustine's vision of the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man as each having a distinct origin, a distinct development and a distinct consummation. Kuitert does not appear to have Kuyper's vision of *Pro Rege*, according to which the sinner, translated from subjection to the covenant wrath of God' to covenant acceptance of God through the death and resurrection of Christ, with all his gifts is employed in wresting the world from the power of Satan to gladsome submission to Christ. Nowhere does Kuitert point out that the wisdom of man is shown to be foolishness with God, whether in science, philosophy, or theology. Nowhere does Kuitert show any awareness of the fact that there is a great debate continually going on between those who presuppose the Biblical view of man, of fact, and of logic; and those who presuppose the apostate view of man, of fact, and of logic. In particular, Kuitert does not appear to realize that in this great debate, every discussion of any fact in any field, whether it is carried on in science or in philosophy or in theology, involves a philosophy of the self and of logic. In his writings Kuitert reasons as though men who do not recognize their need of regeneration by the Holy Spirit can see the kingdom of God and can enter into it.

(6) Kuitert's Frantic Search for Objectivity-Tradition

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The significance of what has just been said appears in its most disastrous form in what Kuitert says about tradition as a means of escape from the extreme subjectivism to which modern theologians are leading him. This is a point of pivotal importance. Accordingly we restate briefly what appears to be the broad line of development of Kuitert's thinking from the beginning to the time when he introduces the notion of tradition as normative. The main thrust of the argument of Kuitert's first book appears to be negative. How radically wrong the Protestant as well as Catholic theologians of the past were because they thought of God as being eternal, and of history as a mere unwinding of the eternal plan of this eternal God. The presupposition of this negative criticism of historic Protestantism is that a proper hermeneutic assumes the *pro-me* theology of Scripture based on the idea of the historic consciousness. Working with this notion enables us, Kuitert thinks, to do away with the "contradiction" involved in the idea of a changeless God being actively present in his changing world. Not only does starting with the historical consciousness enable us to escape contradiction but it can also positively show us the sovereign, free and universal act of grace in operation.

In other words the biblical idea of covenant cannot be brought to modern man unless we reinterpret Christianity in terms of the principles of modern man. It is with this idea of the free self of Kant and his followers, together with the principles of individuation (derived from the notion of pure contingent factuality as correlative to the abstract

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formal principle of Logic) as these are involved in the idea of the “free self,” that Kuitert rejects the historic Protestant position.

(a) Kuitert's Pro-Me Covenant Theology

The biblical view of covenant interaction between God and man, Kuitert argues, cannot be expressed adequately otherwise than in the categories of the historic consciousness.

When in his second book Kuitert undertakes to show how true covenant theology must be expressed in terms of the historical consciousness, he runs headlong into pure subjectivism. At first he appeared to be highly pleased with what the historical consciousness produces. Surely we must begin with Christ, not with Adam. Our orthodox theologians started with Adam and desperately defended the story of his creation and fall as historical. As a result belief in Christ was suspended from belief in an historical Adam. We were expected to believe in the literal truth of all kinds of material that has no bearing at all on the purpose for which Christ came into the world. We were expected to believe in the Bible in the way Mohammedans believe in the Koran. We were expected to give intellectual assent to doctrines about God and his relation to the world which precluded the possibility of our having a personal covenantal relation with God. The dogma of the incarnation and the dogma of verbal inspiration stood in the way of our truly personal confrontation with Christ.

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However as he was carried along with the arguments of those who interpret the biblical covenantal relation between God and man in line with the requirements of the historical consciousness, Kuitert seems to have experienced the nausea of disillusionment. He saw glimpses of the fact that if carried out consistently, the principles implied in the idea of the historical consciousness lead to pure solipsism, to the abyss of the unrelated.

But having inured himself against thinking of God as self-referential, and of man as being truly free and capable of authentic experience only if everywhere and always, in science, in philosophy and in theology, he works within, rather than independently of, the will of God made known through him by Christ in Scripture; Kuitert could not ask the natural man to repent and return to the love and obedience of God.

(b) Kuitert Cries for Help from Drowning Men

In his desperation Kuitert continues unwilling to return to the authority of God speaking through Christ in Scripture. Has not a man like Collingwood told us that when Christ claims to speak to us with authority, we must at least understand what he is saying and why he is saying it? And to understand (*Verstehen*) what anyone speaks to us through documents coming from the past, means that what he says must accord with our adopted principles of interpretation, our notion of human self-sufficient freedom, our notion of formal, all-comprehending unity. Kuitert is drowning and cries to drowning men to save him.

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(c) Kuitert Calls a Summit Conference

Torn between his love for the Christ of his Scripture, the Christ of Luther, of Calvin, of Kuyper and Bavinck, and love for the Christ-Event of post-Kantian theology, Kuitert proposes a way which, he hopes against hope, will show that these two are one. He proposes that both parties start, not merely for argument's sake, but really with the notion of tradition as a neutral area. He calls a general conference of all theologians for a dialogue.

Here are a group of representatives of the Christ-Event of modern theology called to a conference by Kuitert. Kuitert calls the former group the A group and the latter group the B group.

3. Kuitert's Opening Address

Kuitert makes an opening address by saying that both sides should recognize the fact that in their opposition to one another they have often overstated their case.

The two groups need each other. Group A, the modern theologians, needs some of the objectivity of Group B, the traditional theologians; and group B, the orthodox theologians, needs some of the subjectivity of group A. We can all agree with the wise words of Bavinck when he said that the heart of theology is found in a proper proportion between subjectivity and objectivity.

A. Legitimate Subjectivity—Tradition

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If we strive for a balanced position, says Kuitert, we shall stop calling each other names. Both groups will learn to supplement each other. By doing so they will keep from falling into further excesses. In recent theology Group A has fallen into excessive subjectivism; it would be a sad mistake if from reaction, Group B would return to excessive objectivism. To do so would only produce a new pendulum swing toward subjectivism. What we need is a legitimate subjectivity. Bavinck and Berkouwer have shown us how we may discover such a legitimate subjectivity.²²³

To attain to a legitimate subjectivity we must begin together from the concept of tradition, i.e., from faith-content that is handed down. If we start with the tradition, we can all see light in the darkness that now envelops us. We have so far been unable to find a proper principle of hermeneutics. That has kept us from shedding the light of the gospel upon our modern situation. But when we start from tradition there “is given us in the same breath a new hermeneutical starting-point.”²²⁴

Kuitert adds: “The basic question of hermeneutics is not: what can I understand, but much rather: what is the meaning and significance of the content of faith that precedes all contemplation and existence, and which the church received in this passage through the ages?”²²⁵

²²³ Kuitert, *De Realiteit van het geloof*, p. 158. Kuitert mentions Berkouwer’s dissertation on *Geloof en Openbaring en de Nieuwere Duitse Theologie*.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

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At hearing this Group A was about to leave. By understanding they did not mean conceptual penetration. By understanding the faith they meant *Verstehen*, in a sense similar to that which Kant meant by his *Ideen* as over against *Begriffe*. Their understanding did not imply a denial of the openness of the universe. Their understanding denied rather the idea of the closed universe of the older metaphysic.

But Kuitert presently assured them that by proposing tradition as a general givenness of content he did not thereby wish to bring back the old objectivism of a Scripture with a changeless system of conceptually, expressed content. Kuitert quickly assured the men of group A that instead of using the word tradition he could have used the work canon. He said he refrained from using the work canon, however, because this might leave the impression that he was proposing to start with the authority of Scripture. But this we must not do because the question of the authority of Scripture is that “which is in dispute” between us. Instead of using the word canon “we purposely choose the more phenomenologically tinted word tradition in the sense of faith content that is handed down; we mean by it the first instance biblical witness.”²²⁶

B. The Legitimacy of Critical-Historical Research

Starting with tradition, Kuitert continues, means that we start with what is both the most critical and

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

the most promising point. We are right in the midst of all the problematics of the entire history of theology. "Tradition means that the material with which theology concerns itself has come to us historically." This in turn ascribes its proper task to "historical research." A tradition with all its implied questions calls for historical-critical research; this is involved in the very idea of tradition, i.e., that which has been handed down." All of us surely recognize that theology could not properly be called a science if it did not engage in critical-historical research. But criticism must not lead to a subjectivizing of tradition. Ebeling has stressed this fact in his *Wort und Glaube*.²²⁷ Historical critical research must not, of course, make assertions about what is properly beyond its domain.

Kuitert here refers to the resurrection of Christ. Scripture speaks to us of the resurrection of Christ as something unique. Critical historical methodology would go beyond its domain if it pronounced the resurrection to be impossible. If the critical historical method remains within its proper limit and does not deny what is unique, then it can serve as a brake on any tendency toward subjectivism that any of its users may manifest.²²⁸

A second point in favor of starting with tradition is that it expresses the *pro-me* character of theology. Theology must not only be a science; it must be a science that concerns me. Tradition is historical. The tradition which the church today has received from a previous generation, and which in turn it passes

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

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on to a following generation, presents itself as a witness, i.e., as a witness of the historical communion and adventure of Israel with her God, coming to its climax in the witness of communion with Jesus Christ as the unique representative of this God. “The God of Israel is the God who goes along with his people as their covenant-God, speaking and acting with Israel; and who manifests his covenant-character in a unique manner in Jesus Christ.”²²⁹ *Tua res agitur.*

All of us, says Kuitert ought to be agreed upon the appropriateness of building our hermeneutical approach on tradition. Tradition is the point upon which all theologians can and must agree. No one can deny that tradition—the *fides quae*—has had an historically conditioned origin. Here objectivism and subjectivism cooperate. If we start with tradition we need not fear lest we fall into relativism on the one hand or into a piecemeal, abstract view of doctrine on the other hand. “Because God’s self-revelation expressed itself historically i.e., in communion with definite generations, the knowledge of God comes to us as formulated in tradition.”²³⁰

If we have been nurtured on a conceptualizing process of revelation that springs from Aristotle’s metaphysics, this will be difficult for us to appreciate. Yet we cannot do justice to Scripture if we do not regard it as tradition in the sense discussed. “Christian truth cannot do without the mark of this

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

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in its historical character if it is to be Christian truth at all.”²³¹

Still further we must point out, says Kuitert, that this historic character of Christian truth is founded on man’s historic mode of existence.”²³² It is because man lives historically that we have tradition from generation to generation.

Finally Kuitert insists that the idea of tradition, as he sets it forth in his book on *The Reality of Faith*, alone does justice to the biblical idea of God as triune. He did not mention Barth at this point but his view of the trinity as given in this opening address is basically similar to that of Barth. Barth wants a “revelational” trinity, a trinity in which the idea of the triune God is derived from the process of interaction between God and man.

It is only by means of the idea of tradition as our starting, focal point, Kuitert argues, that our hermeneutical problem can be solved.²³³

If the men of group B are worried by my substitution of tradition for the Word of God as the source and standard of truth I may reassure them further by means of the following consideration.

True stability cannot be furnished by a God-in-himself, who is supposed to communicate a set of intellectual propositions to man-in-himself. True stability can only be found in the concrete historical

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

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interaction between God who is God for man, and man who is man for God. True stability rests upon “historical communion” between such a God and such a man.²³⁴

The whole problem of how to communicate this “historical communion” to modern man is now solved in principle. The historical consciousness of the twentieth century readily appropriates to itself the idea of revelation as concrete historical, covenantal interaction between God and man. On this view there is no conflict between a divine and a human factor. We need not fear lest the contribution made by man as the recipient of revelation subjectivizes a once-for-all given content of revelation. God, as well as man has his due in the idea of tradition. Since God is his revelation, he is, says Kuitert, the principle of continuity in history. God is continuous; “he is throughout the ages the same.” He does not change in his will of salvation for men. It is because we deal with “this God” that we may be certain of continuity as well as discontinuity in Christian truth.”²³⁵

Kuitert’s opening address at his Summit Conference constituted an attempt at reconciliation between group A, the neo-orthodox, and group B, the orthodox theologians. In this address Kuitert was, in effect, seeking to pacify his former associates, Kuyper, Bavinck, etc. by suggesting that group A—his present associates, Barth, Ebeling, etc., were merely seeking to do better justice to the person and work of Christ, by stressing the fact that

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

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he is already present in the faith by which they believe in him. The new stress on subjectivity is made in the interest of true objectivity. We must all make the gospel of sovereign universal grace intelligible to modern man. Such biblical terms as God, salvation, grace and reconciliation take on meaning only in terms of the principles of continuity and of discontinuity I have set forth in my writings. We can express what we mean by such words only in terms of images and notions that are available to us in a certain culture. To do this is to make the gospel of all ages available to the present age. "We could not speak of 'reconciliation' if we did not have some notion of what is meant by the idea of a conflict."²³⁶ Many Christians have only vague notions of what grace means; they can form no image of it. "And the word 'God.'" What can we make of it? Nothing at all if we are to take him to be transcendent in the traditional sense of the term. But surely the idea that we are not to form an image of God must be interpreted in terms of the biblical teaching with respect to the "*mensvormigheid Gods*."

Kuitert here refers to his basic work on this subject. We have spoken of it earlier.²³⁷ If we present modern man with a truly covenantal, i.e., with a true *pro-me* theology, then and then only can we expect him to be able to understand what we mean. Thus our hermeneutical problem is solved. Modern man can now understand us. We have done justice to the legitimate claims of the human subject without

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

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failing into scepticism. We need not fear the smile of Feuerbach.

4. Kuitert's Great Betrayal

We can well imagine that group B, the orthodox group of those who were listening to this supposedly pacificatory opening address at the summit conference called by Kuitert soon realized that their cause had been betrayed. The self-referential God whom they as creatures and as redeemed sinners worshipped must, according to Kuitert, be replaced by the self-referential man of Kant and his followers; and they are asked to rejoice in the exchange. To be sure they may still keep their God, but only as a limiting notion, i.e., as a projection of self-sufficient, self-legislating man.

The created and providentially controlled world of Luther and Calvin is to be replaced by the phenomenal realm of Kant.

The Christ who was truly God and truly man, the Christ of the Chalcedon creed, must be replaced by the Christ-Event as an all-enveloping principle of unity dialectically related to ultimate chance as an all-enveloping principle of discontinuity.

The basic difficulty with Kuitert's view is that it is based on the acceptance of the problematics of modern man. We have already spoken of this point in the section dealing with his misalignments. Kuitert's "great discovery" is that of the "historicity of man and his formulations." But what is meant by

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the historicity of man? It is the Kantian notion of human self-sufficiency or autonomy.

Robert Collingwood works out the significance of this notion of autonomy for science and history in the clearest possible way. The historical consciousness, argues Collingwood, must unify all its experiences by starting from the presupposition the “all experience whatever is present.” “A fixed and finished past is a past divorced from present experience; and therefore divorced from evidence (since evidence is always present) and therefore unknowable. ‘What really happened’ is only ‘what the evidence obliges us to believe.’²³⁸ Thus the facts of history are present facts. The historical past is the world of ideas which the present evidence creates in the present. In historical inference we do not move from our present world to a past world; the movement in experience is always a movement within a present world of ideas. The paradoxical result is that the historical past is not past at all; it is present. It is not a past surviving into the present; it must be the present. But it is not the present as such, the merely contemporary. It is present, because all experience whatever is present; but not merely present. It is also past and this pastness involves a modification of its character as experience.”²³⁹

Does Kuitert really rejoice over this great discovery of the self-referential character of the historical consciousness of man? Does he really wish to evaluate his own religious convictions with respect to the death and resurrection of Christ in

²³⁸ Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, p. 107.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

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terms of it? If he does then he cannot stop after rejecting the “historicity” of the Genesis account with respect to the origin of man and the universe. He must then go on and assert that the death and resurrection of Christ are intelligible to modern man only because they are taking place in man’s present experience.

Collingwood’s notion that all experience is present experience is the modern equivalent of Parmenides’ notion that all experience is eternal experience. Moreover, the two are like the convex and the concave side of the same disc. Pure rationalism requires pure irrationalism for its correlative and pure irrationalism requires pure rationalism for its correlative. The idea of the correlativity of pure rationalism and pure irrationalism produces as well as it is being produced by their dialectic interaction. This is true in all forms of apostate thought. The form-matter scheme of Greek thought and the nature-freedom scheme of post-Kantian modern thought both express this dialecticism. The difference between these two forms of dialecticism is that the freedom-nature scheme has more obviously erased any leftovers of rationalism as such than the form-matter scheme had.

Modern science is outspoken in expressing its need of both having pure determinism and pure indeterminism as correlative to one another. Modern science constantly uses the “ideal” of pure determinism as its principle of continuity and the “ideal” of pure indeterminism as its principle of continuity.

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Accordingly too, modern philosophy is outspoken in expressing its needs of having both pure determinism and pure indeterminism as its principles of interpretation. Collingwood's position on the historical consciousness illustrates this fact. He is certain that the traditional view of history cannot be true. There cannot have been such a thing as a transition from wrath to grace through the death and resurrection of Christ in the past, in the orthodox sense of the term. The historical consciousness could make nothing of such an idea. Certainly it is reasonable to say that man must understand what he is told about the past. Therefore the past must be present to me. It is this *pro-me* sort of philosophy that Kuitert has accepted in principle. Correlative to this modern rationalism is the notion that all experience must start with the question why anything exists rather than nothing. This is the notion of pure contingency. Collingwood includes this notion as well as that of pure determinism in his idea of the historical consciousness.

Finally, modern theology agrees with modern science and modern philosophy on this dialectical view of reality and knowledge. The whole of the *pro-me* ideology of recent times is built on this assumption. For Barth, God's continuity is expressed precisely in his ability to turn wholly and without residue into the opposite of himself while yet saving all men from all eternity in Christ.

It is on this basis that Barth's assertion that the Bible is the word of God must be understood. It is on this basis that Kuitert's view of the relation between the divine and the human factors in

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Scripture must be understood. Having accepted the historical consciousness as it is understood by modern thinkers as his starting point, Kuitert has, for all his speaking about God's self-revelation in Christ, given modern man all he wants. His insistence that a real transition from wrath to grace does take place in ordinary history through the death and resurrection of Christ is but the death-throes of a mouse in the mouth of a cat, or of a lamb in the jaws of a wolf. This appears clearly when he deals with the "origin" the "center" and the "end" of history.

A. Kuitert Capitulates to Modern Science on the "Origins of History"

When Kuitert deals with origins as spoken of in the Genesis account, he assumes that the modern scientific methodology is an intelligible something, independent of its relation to the revelation of God through Christ in Scripture. He seems to have no realization of the fact that modern scientific methodology is based on the assumption that man is autonomous and that as such all his "understanding" must be by way of the imposition of his framework of thought upon the purely raw stuff all about and within him. Kuitert appears not to realize that the "many scientific findings" to which he fondly refers, as an incontrovertible basis for the necessity of accepting the modern instead of the historic Protestant view of origins, assume a philosophy of reality that is inherently unintelligible. Modern biological evolutionism, which Kuitert, together with Jan Lever and others, thinks he must by all means accept, is imbedded in modern process philosophy as a whole. Kuitert thinks that his

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theological predecessors were logically bound to believe in Jesus because they were convinced, scientifically as well as religiously, that Adam lived. Is it not obvious, he argues, that the only proper starting point for faith is that which we are told by the evangelists and apostles (and thus by the church and through parents and friends) with respect to Jesus? The fact that God has revealed himself as the Saviour of the world in the way and by the work of Jesus of Nazareth, i.e., by his suffering, his cross and his resurrection, is the fact with which faith began and is drawn out. Without this message there would have been no faith. Not because of Adam, not because of a view of Scripture, but because of the message of Jesus did Christians become Christians. For this reason nothing happens to faith if it appears that Adam was not an historical person. The reality of Jesus is not supported by what the Bible says about Adam but stands on its own feet.²⁴⁰

Kuitert appeals to the Apostle Paul in support of his view. Paul was not interested in Adam as an historical person but as a “teaching-model.” And teaching-models “need not be historical in order to fulfill their task.”²⁴¹

In all this Kuitert’s views resemble those of neo-orthodoxy, in particular those of Barth. We must not say Adam and Christ, but Christ and Adam. But in the case of Kuitert, as in the case of Barth, we do not catch the meaning of this reversal of words unless we understand what he means by Christ. Kuitert’s *pro-me* theology resembles that of Barth. Kuitert, no

²⁴⁰ Kuitert, *Verstaat Gij Wat Gij Leest*, pp. 27–28.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

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less than Barth, has “actualized” the incarnation. This involves that he has “actualized” the Bible as the Word of God. The Bible, as such, is not the Word but points to, and is witness to, the Word. As God is wholly revealed in Christ so he is wholly revealed and wholly hidden in Scripture.

When Kuitert therefore speaks of our faith as having its origin in the witness to Christ given by evangelists and apostles, then this witness itself participates in Christ as here and now, *je und je*, revealing himself to all men.

On this view what the evangelists and apostles say about Jesus must not be, simply cannot be, historical in the orthodox sense of the term. If it were then the whole structure of modern *pro-me* theology would collapse. Flux philosophy and scientific evolutionism would, as the underpinning of *pro-me* theology, collapse with it.

As an evangelical believer Kuitert is ill-advised when he builds his hopes for the primacy of Christ over Adam on the idea of tradition, based on modern process thinking.

We agree that Christian theology must start from Christ. But then this Christ must be the Christ who identifies himself, i.e., who witnesses to himself through the words of the evangelists and apostles.

Kuitert’s view of the evangelists and apostles, like that of Barth, is calculated to destroy this self-witnessing Christ. Kuitert’s evangelists and apostles are constructed after the pattern of Kant’s primacy

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of pure reason. This witness to Christ is the witness of the autonomous man (enmeshed in the I-it dimension but, in the depth of his free personality participant in the I-thou dimension) to a Christ also enmeshed in the I-it dimension, but for some inexplicable reason, more basically noumenal than other men.

If we would see the significance of Kuitert's idea of the "primacy of Christ" over Adam, we must realize that this notion is constructed by means of the principle of the modern nature-freedom scheme, and, more particularly, by means of the principle of the historical consciousness. On this principle, man is a dialectical meeting point between the notion of pure univocism and pure equivocism. On this view Christ cannot possibly differ from any other man or be like any other man. If Christ is like other men he must be wholly like them, i.e., wholly identical with them. If Christ is unlike other men he must be wholly unlike them. The result is that Christ is identical with man, i.e., with the idea of man. As such he is the only man. All other men, to the extent that they are men, participate in Christ as the real man. All other men are men because of the potentiality that somehow resides within them to become, as Plato says, incorporate with being.

On such a view Adam not only need not be historical but must not be historical, in the orthodox sense of the term. But neither then can Jesus Christ be historical in the orthodox sense of the term. If he were he would be an "object of faith." If he were we would be back to the orthodox view of Scripture as containing direct revelation of God; we would once

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more have to join the *beati possidentes* whom Karl Barth so mercilessly excoriated in his Utrecht addresses.

Kuitert's starting point, for the whole of his theology, is essentially the same as that of Barth. Kuitert's primacy of Christ, no less than that of Barth, requires that we base all our thinking about anything, whether in science, in philosophy or in theology, on the idea that the steps on the way downward and the steps on the way upward in the life, death and resurrection of Christ take place here and now in the present. Similarly this primacy of Christ requires that God in Christ turn wholly and completely (*ganz und gar oder gar nicht*) into the opposite of himself and then, on his way upward, takes human nature, human kind, all mankind up into participation with his aseity.

The Adam of the Genesis account may, on this view, be a teaching model for us in that, in all respects we are basically like "him." We are, as he was, derived from animal ancestry which has sprung from pure contingency. As really and truly man (*vere homo*) Jesus Christ has, indeed must have, the same origin as do all other men. Anything less than this spells docetism.

On the other hand the Adam of paradise must, from the beginning, together with all other men, be thought of as already, from all eternity, a participant with Christ who is one with the Father.

When Kuitert appeals to "all manner of scientific discoveries" against the orthodox view of

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beginnings this becomes intelligible only if we realize that the “scientific method” producing these “discoveries” presupposes the post-Kantian view of man and his world. According to this view the second Adam cannot merely be turned into the first Adam; both Adams must be demythologized. Unless this is done modern man cannot understand and therefore cannot accept the “Christian message” at all. By accepting the so-called historical consciousness as his starting point Kuitert has, in principle, given up the Scripture as the Word of God, and the Word of God (the Christ) as witnessing to himself in Scripture.

Kuitert’s activist view of Christ and his activist view of Scripture are involved in one another. With Barth Kuitert says that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Bible is the Word of God. Both times the principle of identification expressed in the word is are taken activistically. And this activism is based upon the Kantian principle that man must be able to identify himself in terms of himself, as sufficient to himself, in the realm of contingency.

When Kuitert argues that the historical conditioning of the Bible and its teaching can only be understood by modern man if we start from the historical character of its revelation, he is, in effect, urging us to reject all that he himself still wants to believe about the death and resurrection of Jesus and that he wants modern man to accept. Kuitert cannot have his cake and eat it too. By his acceptance of the historical consciousness as the ultimate court of appeal he has bought a ticket on a

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non-stop boat from Rotterdam to the Isles of the Blest, somewhere in the noumenal realm of Kant.

B. Kuitert Capitulates to Modern Theology with Respect to the “Center” of History

In what has been said about Kuitert’s sell-out with respect to the origins of history we have virtually said everything that needs saying about his sellout with respect to Christ as the Center of History. We shall therefore simply amplify and clarify what has already been said by relating to Kuitert’s thinking on Jesus Christ to that of Ebeling.

Kuitert expresses great admiration for what Ebeling says in his work *Word and Faith*, especially in its chapter on “Jesus and Faith.”

We shall try to understand what Ebeling says in this chapter and then ask whether having, with Ebeling, adopted the interpretative principles of neo-orthodox theology based on Kantian epistemology, Kuitert can stop short of going all the way in his ideal identification of Jesus as the “object” of faith with Jesus as the “subject” of faith.

To understand Ebeling’s chapter on *Jesus and Faith* we must take note of the setting in which it is placed.

Ebeling seeks, first of all, to show that his view of faith is in line with that of the Reformers. But then, as Barth actualizes the Chalcedon so Ebeling actualizes the Reformation. Both do so with the help of Kant. “The *sola fide* destroys all secretly docetic

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views of revelation which evade the historicalness of revelation by making it a history *sui generis*, a sacred area from which the critical historical method must be anxiously barred.” “In the Reformers’ view, both revelation and faith are discovered in their genuine historicalness, and that quite definitely means that faith is exposed to all the vulnerability and ambiguity of the historical.”²⁴²

It is thus that everything Luther and Calvin stood for is demythologized by means of the historical consciousness based on a Kantian type of philosophy.

Barth did this sort of thing with the help of Sören Kierkegaard many years ago. Ebeling is looking for a hermeneutic that goes beyond Barth in his reinterpretation of the Reformers’ views of Jesus and faith in terms of Kantian principles. Ebeling wants to save appearances with respect to the historical Jesus. Neither Barth nor Bultmann, thinks Ebeling, had done justice to the historical Jesus.

What do we mean, asks Ebeling, when we speak of Jesus? We confess that Jesus is God. But we can “know” nothing of God. Kant has taught us this once and for all. Whether we speak by way of affirmation, by way of negation, or by way of eminence we cannot say anything about God. Barth has anew made us aware of this fact.

But we are obliged to preach. The only way we can preach is if we have the courage to actualize the

²⁴² Gerhard Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), p. 56.

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incarnation. That of which we can conceptually say nothing must be made ethically primary. We must have the courage to interpret the phenomenal in terms of the noumenal. There is no teleology in nature and history if we look at them *von unten*. Yet we must maintain the postulate of the primacy of the ethical over the natural. We must postulate God as God for us, i.e., for mankind, in Christ. It is this God-for-us in Christ who lights up our ethical consciousness.

Nobody knows or can know anything about the noumenal, says Kant. Richard Kroner calls this position ethical dualism. Traditional Protestantism claims to know a great deal about the noumenal. Historic Protestantism is wrong. Orthodox Protestantism claims to know—on the basis of revelation—something about where and how God, who lives and moves and has his being in the noumenal, appeared in Jesus Christ in the phenomenal. With Kant Barth rejects this orthodox view and accepts that ethical dualism of Kant. With Ebeling Kuitert also accepts this dualism. Kuitert's orthodox predecessors do not work upon the basis of such a dualism; therefore they are said to be obviously and completely mistaken in their view of God, of man and of Christ. Bavinck did not begin to realize what his statement really meant when he said, *omnia abeunt in mysterium*. He did not realize that God himself is, together with ourselves, enveloped in pure contingency.

The Genesis narrative cannot mean to tell us anything about what actually happened in the realm of the phenomenal. It must be interpreted as

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suggesting that all men are in exactly the same position as this imaginary first man, i.e., surrounded in absolute mystery. All men are “in Adam.” Kierkegaard has made this plain to us. Brunner has shown how the orthodox view of Adam reduces the ethical dimension of man’s life to the merely natural dimension.

Nobody knows anything about anything. We must begin with the absolute questionableness of everything. Existentialism has taught us this.

Since nobody knows anything about anything the orthodox Christian who claims to know something about everything must be wrong. The appeal to revelation does not offer the orthodox believer any escape. The God of orthodoxy is as questionable to us and to “himself” as man is questionable to himself. The idea of pure contingency requires nothing less.

But then this idea of pure contingency also requires the idea that man knows everything about everything. Without this modern man could not know that the God of orthodoxy cannot exist because all reality is purely contingent. Pure rationalism and pure irrationalism are assumed as correlative to one another by modern thinkers. Only one point needs to be added, namely, that a measure of incommensurability is assumed to exist between these two in favor of pure rationalism. How else could one explain that logic has any relation to fact at all?

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Now Ebeling explains the relation between Jesus and Faith in terms of this sort of ontology. In doing so he is, he thinks, shedding some light on the hermeneutical problem.

Ebeling begins by saying that “Christianity stands or falls with the tie that binds it to its unique historical origin. That means first of all that Christianity is an historical phenomenon. It derives from a definite historical past and therefore stands in historical relation to that past.” To say this much is, however, not enough. We must ascribe “to this historical origin once and for all abiding, normative, absolute significance for the whole historic origin of Christianity is assigned the character of revelation. It is thereby withdrawn from the relativity and transience of all historic events. It forms a realm which is once and for all defined—distinguished from all other phenomena of history—a judgment which finds expression in the fixing of the canon of holy scripture.”²⁴³

Now “revelation is primarily and properly a definite event namely, the event attested in holy scripture—which again, to define it still more closely and state its absolute peculiarity, is the appearance of Jesus Christ. To this event, then—the event of revelation in the most proper sense, and the one in which at the same time the historical origin of Christianity is concentrated—there belongs once and for all abiding, normative, absolute significance. The event in question is one which, although it is attested as a unique historical event and as such

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

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belongs to a definitely fixed past, nevertheless does not become a thing of the past but has a constant present quality. The historical Jesus of Nazareth is proclaimed as the present Lord exalted to the right hand of God, the work wrought in his suffering, dying and rising again is proclaimed as the salvation that is wrought for all time, and therefore always present.”²⁴⁴

Here then we have a description of “what for Christianity is the constitutive understanding of its origin and nature” and as such it has “a very profound bearing on the hermeneutic question.”²⁴⁵

Ebeling has, he says, given a broad and neutral description of Christianity. As such it is, he thinks, in line with the position of the Reformers. But in fact the whole of a Kantianized interpretation of the Reformation and of Christianity is involved in his view of Christ.

The ontology and epistemology in terms of which Ebeling sets forth the “unique” and “normative” significance of his Christ is set forth more fully in his chapter on “Theology and Reality.”

As Christians we must have the courage to start *von oben*, from the revelation of God in Christ. Then all other matters will fall in place, even science and philosophy. “The reality of God makes itself known only by revelation by faith.”²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

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We must not ask whether what Christ, as the unique revelation of God, “tells us” about reality can be verified by a reality first interpreted apart from Christ. To be sure, we can and must, by the ordinary methods of historical criticism, show that the orthodox view of God, of revelation and Scripture is wrong.²⁴⁷ But then when we come to state our own view of Christ in relation to reality as a whole we must start *von oben*. Our scientific manipulation of historical data can, at most, point toward the realm of personal encounter with God. Thus it is the subject of which theology speaks that must verify reality.²⁴⁸

If we did not thus start from above we would slip back with orthodoxy into phenomenological objectivity. This we must, at all costs, avoid. For Ebeling this cost is great. He has shown, he thinks, by “objective” phenomenological evidence that the orthodox view of Christ and the Scripture is against the facts and against logic. Jesus cannot be what orthodox theology has said he is. The Chalcedon creed as historically considered cannot be true. The Scriptures cannot be the direct revelation of God. In addition the phenomenal world must be the platform from which man can take off into the noumenal realm in order in it to negate the existence of any God who is not exhaustively expressed in his relation to man.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, See Ebeling’s chapter “Significance of the Critical Historical Method,” pp. 17–61.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

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All this must be done in spite of the fact that pure contingency underlies the phenomenal world no less than the noumenal.

Having thus said, in effect, that inasmuch as pure contingency is a basically constitutive element both in man and in his environment, no man can know anything about anything; Ebeling then undertakes to show that the God of historic Christianity cannot exist.

All this is done in the name of the historical consciousness. Standing on what, in his view, is a platform of a sliver of floating ice on a bottomless and shoreless ocean of boiling water, Ebeling projects a God into infinite darkness and then asserts that this God comes down to all men everywhere in Christ telling them that all is well for now and for the future of all mankind.

This kind of theology is then said not to be a “theological ontology but a fundamental ontology open to general discussion, and one in which the derivative modes of reality, such as natural science’s concept of reality, will also have their place.”²⁴⁹

It is with the help of such an ontology and epistemology that Ebeling is able to understand, as he thinks, both the true nature of Jesus and of faith. In this way he has done justice both to the nature of Jesus as truly and uniquely historical, and to the nature of faith as based on personal encounter with Jesus. “The result will then be a concept of reality which takes its bearings not on objectification but on

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 199.



historic encounter, not on the availability of reality but on its linguisticity, not on the existing present but on the future which is still to come.”²⁵⁰

We ask now, does Kuitert not sense the fact that his enthusiasm for Ebeling’s views on the nature of faith makes little sense unless he accepts Ebeling’s position with respect to ontology as a whole? Well, there is no evidence in Kuitert’s writings to show that he senses the basically destructive nature of Ebeling’s views on reality as a whole.

Ebeling is perfectly consistent with his view on ontology when he says that Jesus cannot properly be called the object of faith.²⁵¹ The “decisive gift of Jesus is the faith which makes existence sure, i.e., which points to its ground and so grounds it—.” Jesus “is the source of faith.”²⁵²

It is thus that Ebeling thinks we can understand the nature of faith. It is a “movement in which the whole of existence is given aim, definition and ground. Faith is thus not a pale, empty category; rather it has to do with the concentratedness of existence, with the fact that man, prior to all the separate partial aspects in which he manifests himself and into which he divides himself and dissipates his energies, is one and the same and a whole. Precisely through the movement of being

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 238.

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thrown upon God the wholeness of existence comes into view.”²⁵³

We can understand the structural elements of our own faith by looking at “Jesus’ concept of faith.”

(a) “Faith gives certainty to existence, indeed it is really nothing else but existence in certainty.” Accordingly faith “sets itself against fear.” It is “taking sure steps although no road is visible.”²⁵⁴

(b) Accordingly faith is “directed towards the future, indeed it is really bringing about the future. It has its place in the movement of time and in all that that may bring and present.”²⁵⁵ The future “belongs to the wholeness of existence.” The man without a future is “only half a man.” In bringing about the future faith makes man a whole man.

(c) “For that reason faith is power, indeed it is really participation in the omnipotence of God.”²⁵⁶ As such faith “can do unusual, exceptional things. It is surrendering oneself resignedly to reality, but acquiring power over reality.” Thus faith is “participation in the essence of God. We fail to see what faith is all about if we do not perceive the dimension to which his daring way of putting it points.”²⁵⁷

Of course this “daring way” of speaking of faith is the daring way of Kant and his followers. Faith is

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

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faith because its basic characteristic is that of the realm of Kant's noumenal self. One certainly misunderstands the nature of faith unless it is seen in terms of man as wholly free, i.e., wholly contingent. All the great modern theologians, such as Schleiermacher, Ritschl and Barth with their many associates build their whole approach to reality on this view of man and reality as purely contingent. It is this "freedom" of pure contingency that liberates them, as they think, from the determinism of the orthodox point of view. If man were not "free" how could faith have any meaning? And is not the perfect man, the man who is really man, who really is man alone, the man Jesus, free? Is God not truly free because he can and does turn wholly into the opposite of himself (*ganz und gar oder gar nicht*)? In fact it must be said that God in Christ is more really and absolutely free than man. No man can turn wholly and absolutely into the opposite of himself. Man is bound to the realm of necessity, the realm of natural law, the realm of science, and therefore of intellectual abstractions.

But being wholly beyond and above the natural conceptual realm of existence, God in Christ can identify himself wholly and without residue with that realm. God in Christ is wholly everywhere present in nature and ordinary history, but present as wholly hidden. He is wholly revealed and as such wholly hidden.

Man is man as fellow-man with Jesus as participating in this omnipresent wholly hiddenness of Christ in all of nature and history.

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All this stress on absolute contingency is, however, only to point to one side of the disc. It is the side represented in Greek philosophy by the notion of *my on*. But in Greek philosophy the *my on* was thought of as something that ought not to be either intellectually or morally. Some day man would overcome it. He would overcome it because, by virtue of his intellect, he participated in the world of eternal ideas. But then he could be thus victorious over himself as an individual. To be saved was to be eternalized.

However, in modern times, especially since Kant, man refuses to be eternalized. He does not want to lose his individual identity. How then can man retain his identity and yet have the benefit of permanence? Individuation is assumed to be by virtue of contingency. This principle must, therefore, not be lost. Contingency must therefore be incorporated into eternity. How glorious the vision of modern philosophers when it was first seen that God is eternal precisely in the fact that the very idea of contingency always and everywhere requires his presence!

How still more glorious the vision when modern theologians saw that they could actualize the incarnation and thereby make Jesus Christ, the son of God and son of man the teaching-model for all other men: Christ could serve as the model. Only if he was, on the one hand, infinitely different from them and if, on the other hand, he was more deeply identical with themselves than they themselves, apart from him, could be. Thus Christ is truly God and truly man because all men are from all eternity

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participant in his “eternity” and in his “contingency.” Only thus can Jesus be the ground of faith. Only thus can modern man understand himself for what he is in Christ. It is thus that faith is “saving faith.”²⁵⁸

The reader should observe that for Ebeling, as for modern theology in general, Jesus Christ is the postulated point of identity between God and man. In Greek philosophy man thought of himself as participant in the eternal changeless being of “God” by virtue of his intellect. To find himself he had, according to Plato, to “become incorporate with being.”

The result of this point of view was that nowhere on earth could any genuine reality be found. All temporal existence, all plurality, is really, basically non-existent. It was only inconsistently that any reality could be ascribed to man or to any of his historical doings.

Then came Christianity with its notion of the presence of the God-man actually present among men. This was a wonderful idea. Of course it had to be allegorized, or, today we would say, demythologized to be usable. If it were not demythologized one would have a hopeless dualism between God and man. As soon as it was demythologized, you had both a fine principle of continuity and a fine principle of discontinuity between God and man. Eternity would be the permanent element in time, and time would be the changing element in eternity. All that needed now to be done was to postulate a point of absolute identity

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

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between God and man in history. Jesus Christ was postulated as such. The point of identity need no longer be postulated as wholly beyond man; it can now be postulated as present in the midst of men. God is truly walking near unto man. On the other hand, the principle of a God-man present in history provided the notion of the possibility of infinite development of every individual human person.

It is this notion of the dialectical interrelation of God and man which, according to Ebeling, “comes to expression” in Jesus.²⁵⁹

Accordingly “the proper question about the past is not: What happened? What were the facts”? How are they to be explained? or something of that kind, but: What came to expression?”²⁶⁰

When we answer the question “What came to expression in Jesus?” we at the same time answer the question “What is history?” And therewith we have also, in principle, answered the hermeneutical problem. We have done so because we have then realized that faith is what it is ideally, in that it is identical with Jesus. “For faith itself is the coming to its goal of what came to expression in Jesus. The man who believes is with the historical Jesus.”²⁶¹

The narrative of the resurrection of Jesus becomes intelligible on the basis of the principle identity of faith and Jesus. The “appearance of Jesus and the coming to faith of the man who is granted

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

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the appearance (of the risen Christ) or his becoming a witness to faith, are one and the same thing.”²⁶² After Easter “Jesus appeared as what he really was, as the witness to faith. But we recognize the witness to faith only when, believing ourselves, we accept his witness and now ourselves as witnesses to Jesus become witnesses to faith.”²⁶³

Ebeling’s view of faith and its relation to Jesus may be summed up in the following words. “To believe in Jesus therefore means; to enter into relations with God in view of him, to let him give us the freedom to believe, to let him as the witness to faith be the ground of faith and therefore to enter into relations with him and his ways and consequently to participate in what faith is promised participation in, namely, the omnipotence of God.”²⁶⁴

Through faith in Christ we can speak responsibly of God. We can do so because through his faith as the ground of our faith we know that on the one hand reality is basically contingent and on the other hand it is basically determined. Through participation in the faith of Christ in God we participate in the very questionableness of God even while in this questionableness we have the answer to the riddle of our existence. Thus “the task of a comprehensive analysis of reality, which cannot be completed once and for all, but the study of which is the constant, historically conditioned and historically motivated act of reflective questioning,

²⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 301.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

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would now be: to observe the radical questionableness of reality.” The true quest for God is possible only for the man who has found him. To have found him here means, to abide by the quest of God and the search for God.”²⁶⁵ Thus “the knowledge of God itself has and retains its place within the sphere of radical questionableness.”²⁶⁶

It is difficult to see why Ebeling needs Jesus at all. On his view Jesus is, if possible, more deeply immersed in pure contingency than any other man. If his faith is to be the ground of the faith of other men, this must be because he has a deeper sense of the questionableness of all reality, of God, of man, and of himself as the God-man.

On his view Jesus is, more basically identical with God, as the changeless principle which, by its nature destroys all questionableness.

Presumably then Ebeling needs Jesus as a teaching-model to tell us what we are. That this is actually the case appears clearly in that for him “the Gospel is the radical transposition of man which takes place in the conscience and by which he comes, as one under the law, to stand ‘*supralegem*.’ ”²⁶⁷

What has just been said about Ebeling’s view of Jesus and faith may serve us as a background for understanding what Kuitert means when he says that we must solve the hermeneutical problem by

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 349.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 349–350.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 410.

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beginning with tradition. A theology that starts with tradition has true “objectivity”; it does not fall into the extremes of existentialist views. Orthodoxy is unable to offer any such objectivity; it therefore has no objectivity with which to counteract the objectivism of existential thinking. Orthodoxy was unable to offer true objectivity because it overstated its claims. It was unwilling to recognize the fact that the subject has legitimate claims. It is only if we own the legitimate claims of the subject that we can have true objectivity.

Kuitert thinks that by thus starting with tradition, he is thinking in line with and beyond Bavinck and Berkouwer.²⁶⁸

But Kuitert is trying to have his cake and eat it too. He wants to follow Bavinck and he wants to follow Ebeling. He wants to have a handed-down content of faith, which precedes all contemplation and existence (*aan alle bezinning en existentie voorafgaande overgeleverde geloofsgoed*) while wanting at the same time to replace Scripture by tradition as the source from which this faith-content takes its start. But Kuitert has chosen for Ebeling against Bavinck by saying that we cannot start with Scripture because it is Scripture that “is in dispute.”²⁶⁹

Kuitert says that we must not make the question “what can I understand?” the starting point of our theology. To do so would conflict with the “pretensions which this tradition has with respect to

²⁶⁸ Kuitert, *De Realiteit Van het geloof*, p. 158.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

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itself.”²⁷⁰ But, we ask, what can this pretension mean? What is the nature of this, that is of this kind of tradition, that does not want to submit to the understandability of man? Kuitert would need to start with Scripture, in order to have that sort of tradition. Any notion of tradition that does not spring from the canon of Scripture as the word of absolute authority springing from the self-attesting Christ is itself the product, of the would-be self-understanding man. The Roman Catholic view of tradition is the projection of the would-be autonomous man in terms of the form-matter scheme of Greek philosophy. The modern neo-orthodox view of tradition is the projection of the nature-freedom scheme of modern philosophy.

The so-called modern historical consciousness on which Kuitert frankly builds his *pro-me* thinking is based on the idea of man’s self-understanding as the ultimate starting-point for theology. Having committed himself to this modern existential framework of thinking and having rejected, openly and repeatedly, the entire framework of Reformation-thinking, he can only retain his faith in the Christ of the Scriptures at the cost of inner inconsistency. He is on the liberty train to modern solipsism and must go along to the last station, namely death.

The self-attesting Christ of Scriptures tells us that through his death and resurrection and through the regenerating activity of his Holy Spirit there is escape from the wrath to come in ordinary history for men.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

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In the name of the self-attesting man of an existentialist philosophy Ebeling rejects this Christ. There can be, he argues, no “inner connection” between Christ and faith unless the incarnation be actualized. Claiming to follow the Reformers he actually follows the activist notion of Romanism. In fact he goes further than Romanism. For him, even more obviously than for Romanism, the church is the continuation of the incarnation. To avoid all secret forms of docetism Ebeling constructs a Christ, with whom, to be men at all, they must be ever in the process of immersing themselves in pure contingency and emerging out of it into pure changeless eternity. On this basis, there has not been because there could not be, either at the beginning or at any later point of “history,” any event that was a completed act of God or of man. Chalcedon must be actualized and with it the idea of Scripture must be actualized. The Reformers did not do this job thoroughly enough. “Certainly where the historical is concerned nothing whatsoever can be exempted from questioning.”²⁷¹ Therefore the Christian tradition cannot have its inception in Jesus except as Jesus himself is wholly questionable to himself. Only thus is he really man. Only thus is there a “unity of Jesus with faith. For it is only where faith is concerned that this concentration of a man on one single point can take place. But as for the fact that it is true only of Jesus that all that can be said of him may be summed up by saying that faith came to expression in him that belongs under the head of historical contingency.” Thus the “encounter with Jesus himself as the witness to faith although, or in

²⁷¹ Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, p. 296.

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fact even because, he is not encountered directly but as one who belongs historically to the past.”²⁷²

It is with this background that we can understand what Ebeling means by tradition, and why we find ourselves dependent on tradition. Kuitert could scarcely have found a better teaching model for his view of tradition than that presented by Ebeling. Ebeling’s view of tradition springs from his *pro-me* theology based on his activist view of the incarnation and revelation. When we speak of God people may expect us to use the concept of revelation. This might be done but unless we first actualize revelation and in that case it is really identical with tradition.²⁷³

In the interest of beginning on the basis of “phenomenological observation” we therefore bracket the idea of revelation. We have seen Kuitert do the same. We must reject the historic Protestant view of direct revelation in order to have a genuinely historical starting point for tradition. In all this Kuitert follows on Ebeling’s heels.

Moreover, unless we have the new activist ontology and a modern *pro-me* theology, there would be nothing that the past could transmit to us. All of reality must be historical in the existential sense that it is a process of man’s coming to self-awareness and seeking to embody his projected ideals in a universe that is for some unknown reason “willing” to submit to man’s effort. It is not God whose speaking and doing in Christ in finished form

²⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 297.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

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produces the content of faith to be handed down the ages of time. The reverse is the case. The tradition “by which our speaking of God is supported, and on which it is entirely dependent—springs from “different depths” than orthodoxy has ever realized. This tradition is the source of our speaking about God. “It is the source from which, if at all, we must derive our doctrine of God.” The “formal reference to revelation of course merely describes the authority of this tradition, but does not explain it.”²⁷⁴

Living up to the requirements of modern existential thinking in his statement of the meaning of tradition, Ebeling religiously satisfies the demands of pure rationalism as well as those of pure irrationalism. First, tradition must not spring from a God who in Jesus speaks directly to men. As a man Jesus as well as other men must spring forth from the realm of the purely questionable, the purely contingent. This takes care of the notion of the pure contingency freedom of man and of the purely “sovereign” nature of the grace of God. But then, correlative to this, is the notion of pure rationality. “Had we not heard of God, had we not been taught about him, were he not proclaimed to us, were he not announced to us, were he not handed down by tradition to us, what resources would we then really have for contesting a doctrine of God—indeed, how would the idea of a doctrine of God ever occur to us at all? The givenness of God means his existence in history.”²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 336.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

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Thus the requirements of the historical consciousness so well expressed by Collingwood are satisfied. Modern theology has now constructed a Jesus who is both wholly unknown and wholly known. This sort of Jesus modern man can “understand,” because he is nothing more than the personification of his ideal self, a self both wholly free and wholly determined, wholly unknown and wholly known. Having bought a ticket on the liberty train of Kant and signed up with the historical consciousness as to its view of man and the universe, Kuitert was compelled, against his will no doubt, to accept the identity of faith and Jesus. Kuitert’s principle of tradition is constructed in terms of post-Kantian principles of ontology. Accordingly, the objectivity that Kuitert thinks he finds by means of his notion of tradition is nothing other than the personification of the principle of unity which modern would-be autonomous man constructs from its own resources.

The Jesus constructed by the “new hermeneutic” and the “new quest” differs from other men only in that he is, a more absolutely correlative intersection point between absolute contingency and absolute determinism than are other men.

The modern theologians are crowding around Kuitert, urging him to bow before their Moloch, which, they insist, is God alone. As noted one of his publications has the title, *Do You Understand What You Read?* Is it possible that Kuitert does not understand what he reads? Or does he not agree when Kuyper says that the “natural principle” is out to suppress the “special principle” at every point at

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which they confront each other. Does he really think that it is possible to make an intelligible synthesis between the Christian position which builds on the triune self-contained God of Scripture and the position of apostate man which builds on the supposed self-contained character of man? Is Kuitert ready to forsake Jesus when he is led to the cross? Does he no longer want the Jesus Christ of Luther and Calvin, of Kuyper and Bavinck, who on the cross said. "It is finished"? Does he no longer believe that there is now no condemnation for those for whom Christ died and rose again?

One thing appears to be clear. The principle of the historical consciousness to which he has committed himself allows for no "absolutes" in history. Having committed himself to the pure relativism involved in the historical consciousness he has done what the prodigal did in the parable of Jesus. Apparently Kuitert does not understand: (a) the absolute principle antithesis between the Christ of the Scriptures and the Christ of modern reconstruction and (b) that the latter gives expression to an ontology, an epistemology and an ethic which is inherently meaningless and which leaves men under the wrath of the Lamb.

C. Kuitert Capitulates to Modern Philosophy with Respect to the "End" of History

We have seen that Kuitert's rejection of the historicity of the Genesis account of human and cosmic origins is part of his acceptance of the modern post-Kantian scheme of ontology. We have seen further that, such being the case, Kuitert's *pro-*

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me theology leads him to a reinterpretation not only of the beginning but also of the center of history. We conclude our consideration of Kuitert's views now by pointing out that his principle leads him on finally to a reinterpretation of the consummation of history as presented in Scripture in favor of modern philosophy.

Previously we have dealt with Kuitert's principle of tradition. We pointed out that this notion of tradition is basically the same as that of Ebeling. Ebeling's description of tradition as some vague cosmic principle by which man evolves out of chaos toward the ideal of a complete self-sufficient self-consciousness must now be shown to be identical with the typical post-Kantian view of ontology, and therefore of eschatology.

We take the work of Ernst Bloch on *The Principle of Hope* (*Das Prinzip Hoffnung*).

(1) Ernst Bloch—Das Prinzip Hoffnung

Ernst Bloch's work is massive and comprehensive. It is as ambitious in its conception as was Hegel's philosophy of history. It is, as it were, Hegel brought up to date. It is Hegel brought up to date because there is proportionately more stress on irrationalism and contingency and therefore less stress on rationalism and determinism in it than there is in Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*.

Bloch assumes that human self-consciousness emerges from a bottomless shoreless ocean of pure contingency. He also assumes that this idea of pure

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contingency cannot be seen for what it is unless a principle of absolute determinism be operative in relation to it from the beginning.

When man thinks of himself as forever moving forward toward the light of pure self-consciousness, he at the same time thinks of himself as, in principle, in control of all the forces of reality. With ever increasing clarity evolving man is building his home. He dreams forever of the day when he has completed his home and dwells in safety in it, sitting about his hearth, his hunger satisfied, all evil remaining forever outside. The last word of his book is Home (*Heimat*). We can understand man's past, his present and his ideal for the future only if we see it as the process of man's striving toward his ideal of absolute control over all things, with ever new worlds to conquer. The hope of any man is the same as the hope of every man. Jesus as well as other men had the same ideal of world-betterment and human perfection that all other men have had in the past and have today.

Man begins his course through history from pure emptiness.²⁷⁶ He develops all manner of drives within himself that lead him on and on toward ever increasing differentiation.²⁷⁷ Gradually he senses an internal completeness within himself.²⁷⁸ He learns to distinguish between old and new. He develops utopias in every direction. His imagination develops

²⁷⁶ Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, 3 volumes (Frankfort: Suhrkamp Verlag.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 55 ff.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 129 ff.

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allegories and symbols.²⁷⁹ He continues to think of great possibilities before him (*Der Mensch ist nicht dicht—Vieles in der Welt ist noch unges chlossen*).²⁸⁰

Man may engage in contemplation but basically he is a creature that makes decisions. He is surrounded by forces over which he has no control. The future seems to overwhelm him. But he controls his fate by intelligent decision. (*Durch das Doppelte von Mut und Wissen kommt die Zukunft nicht als Geschick über den Menschen, sondern der Mensch kommt über die Zukunft und tritt mit dem Seinem in sie ein*).²⁸¹

Man learns to face the future boldly. Man is the creature who still has much before him (*Der Mensch ist dasjenige, was noch vieles vor sich hat*).²⁸² No man exists authentically at any given time. *Carpe diem* is his motto but he never grasps his opportunity fully.²⁸³ Absolute darkness surrounds him and penetrates his being every moment. As in a blinding snowstorm he is so near to and yet so far away from his home. Facts as such, do not exist for man. The “that in the present is hollow: it is indeterminate, as a fermenting nothing, Nothingness is lack of something and, as such, it is a flight from this lack; and as such, it is a driving toward that which it lacks.”²⁸⁴

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 199 ff.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 224–225.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 284.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 341.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 356.

As it develops, the consciousness of man both presupposes and constructs the idea that the genuinely present (*echter Gegenwart*) requires both the notion of pure contingency and the notion of an all-determined reality, taken as correlative to one another. An actually existing utopia and pure brute factuality are by themselves equally meaningless. Taken as correlative to one another they constitute the essence of the historical consciousness of man.

But what of death? It is, of course, a part of life. But is life also a part of death? Will man, with his dreams, disappear as does the beast?²⁸⁵ Is death merely an aspect of the nothingness which yields to the striving of man? Dread of death is inherent in life.²⁸⁶ Is there any escape from it? What did the Jews mean when they spoke of Enoch as being taken into the presence of God without passing through the tunnel of death?²⁸⁷ They said this was a reward for his dedication to God. Well, he was admittedly an exception. So was Elijah. A break-through toward the idea of immortality did not come till Daniel, about 160 B.C. Daniel was concerned with the thirst for righteousness. Accordingly the desire for life after death became a postulate and the post-mortal scene became a tribunal. Faith in immortality became a means with which to overcome doubt with respect to God's righteous governance of the world; above all the hope of resurrection became a judicial-moral

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1299.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1304.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1323.

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question. When earthly jurisdiction failed of justice, rectification would be made in the after-life.²⁸⁸

The idea of a general resurrection came to expression first in the century just before Christ.²⁸⁹ But there was always the idea that damnation awaited the unjust. This was the second death. Jesus lived in this faith.²⁹⁰ And the “Jesus-sect” followed him in this. They took the prophecy of Daniel to indicate a dramatic cosmic end.

Bloch speaks more fully of Jesus when he discusses the founders of religions. These appear in the course of history. Speaking of the leaders Bloch continues his essentially Kantian approach to reality. There is first, to use Kroner’s terminology in describing Kant’s primacy of the practical reason, what he calls ethical dualism. Man is free, utterly free in the noumenal realm. Man is determined, utterly determined in the phenomenal realm. The two realms stand over against one another. Knowledge is of the phenomenal realm and behavior is of the noumenal realm. Never the twain shall meet.

However, as Plato had to overcome his original dualism between the world of ideas and the world of sense, so Kant had to overcome the dualism between his world of pure freedom and his world of pure necessity. A study of the phenomenal world excludes absolutely the concept of purpose. Even so we must postulate the idea of a God who rewards the good over against the evil, as we have seen

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1324.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1325.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1327.

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them function in the phenomenal world. We must even postulate an influence of the noumenal world upon the phenomenal world. So we may postulate the incarnation. We “think,” not conceptually but in some other way not to be described, of Jesus as the Son of God incarnate as a man.

In fashion similar to Kant, Bloch speaks of Jesus as a man with a vision restricted to the phenomenal world. He does not concern himself with the noumenal realm, i.e., with a second death. However, a bit later Jesus does interest himself in the noumenal and its impingement upon the phenomenal.

Jesus is the originator of a new religion. He is a prophet. He is a great prophet. He visualizes a utopia of a perfect world.²⁹¹ He has a hope that is built on the vision of absolute perfection. This absolute perfection is not a static but a living perfection.²⁹² This is his message, his gospel. This is the gospel of the kingdom of God.

Of course, Jesus lived in a framework of myth; but the man filled the framework.²⁹³ The Christian Faith more than any other lives in the historical reality of its founder.²⁹⁴ But Caiaphas understood Jesus well when he took his message to be basically eschatological. Jesus is indeed Eschatological through and through—.²⁹⁵ The weary and the heavy

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1403.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 1404.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 1483.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1486.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1491.

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laden will have their rest.²⁹⁶ There will be complete fulfillment in every respect (*totale Gleichsetzung der Stiftung mit den Stiflungsenhalt, das Gottesreich*).²⁹⁷

In Kantian terms; the phenomenal will be wholly subject to the noumenal; the natural to the ethical. In following Bloch, we have in effect, followed Kant's primacy of the practical reason, the realization of the ideals which self-sufficient moral man has set before himself. The entire drama of Scripture is subordinated to the notion of the ethical monism of modern philosophy. In particular all that Scripture says about the transcendent self-sufficiency of God is brought within the control of man. God is what he is in Christ incarnate and Christ-incarnate is what he is as the personification of the kingdom-ideal of would-be autonomous man (*Der göttliche Gesandte wird der Sender selbst*).²⁹⁸ A new God comes into existence, unheard of till now, one who sheds his blood for his children.²⁹⁹ Jesus sets men free from the control of demons.³⁰⁰

After his death men developed the notions of his resurrection, ascension and return.³⁰¹ Jesus became the anchor of their hope. He would be the first of those that sleep and rise again. He would return to complete the kingdom of man. During his absence

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 1492–1493.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1493.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1494.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1498.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1500.

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from them his Spirit would comfort them and lead them into the truth.³⁰²

Having become immanent in man he is gradually reshaped as the ideal for mankind. Hegel carried forth the *Cur Deus homo* question to its conclusion. Feuerbach expressed the simple truth when he said that man is not created in the image of God but that God is created in the image of man.³⁰³ The *homo absconditus* replaces the *Deus absconditus*.³⁰⁴ This *Deus absconditus* has from the beginning sought for self-consciousness and self-realization.³⁰⁵ (*Der Mensch ist der Gott des Christentums, die anthropologie ist das Geheimnis der Theologie.*)³⁰⁶ The mystery of the trinity is the mystery of man.³⁰⁷

The basic miracle (*Grundwunder*) is the idea of a general cosmic apocalypse.³⁰⁸ The idea of Sprung is built into modern man's view of reality.³⁰⁹

Of course this leap toward the better is not to be directly identified with any "fact" of the phenomenal world. It is not time as such but "that in time which does not belong to it, communicates with eternity, eternity as perfect joy."³¹⁰

³⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 1501.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 1517.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1518.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1519.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1520.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1521.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1544.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1545.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1548.

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It is this *Augenblick* that Goethe apostrophized with his winged words: *Verweile doch du bist so schön*.

In this moment the distinction between subject and object has ceased. The pure brute factuality of the self and of its world is seen as identical with the pure perfection of the self and its world.³¹¹

Bloch's point here is the modern way of expressing the Parmenidean notion that in ultimate reality man is absorbed into identity with changeless being. Of course, Bloch, together with all post-Kantian philosophy, stresses the idea of pure contingency in man and the world as something ultimate, as something that remains even in the "attainment" of perfection. Through this stress on pure contingency as ultimate Bloch, together with modern philosophy in general, has preserved the freedom of man. There is no absorption of man into abstract rationality as there is in Parmenides. No such absorption could take place because universal rationality is itself made correlative to pure contingency.

In concrete terms this means on the one hand, that there can never be any such thing as an absolute revelation of an absolute self-existent God in the phenomenal world, and on the other hand that rationality is present in every man.

In Bloch's philosophy of history we have an extremely comprehensive interpretation of all of reality in terms of human autonomy and its

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1549.

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operating principle of the pure correlativity between pure contingency and pure determinism. The progress of history is, on this view, to be found in the postulated incommensurability between pure contingency and pure determinism in favor of the latter. Pure contingency is pure freedom and pure freedom spells *de facto* evil. Pure determinism is pure rationality and *de facto* goodness. And the good must prevail over evil.

When Plato made God the source of the good in this world only and, postulated a principle of evil equal in ultimacy with God as the source of evil in this world; then he had *Diotema* the inspired postulate the idea of the Good as supreme. Plato overcame his theoretical dualism by an ethical, i.e., non-intellectual, postulation of the victory of the good over evil. Bloch does the same sort of thing in terms of Kant's ethical dualism overcome by his ethical phenomenalism. For Bloch all reality is process. Heraclitus is his hero. But there must be progress in this process, There must be victory of good over evil. Of course there must be no absolute distinction between good and evil, even at the end. Then freedom would be lost together with evil. Man's essence is rational freedom and free rationality. This is man's essence because it is the essence of reality. Ever onward toward the goal, with the goal ever receding, lest man should become happy of necessity.

It is thus that Bloch builds historic Christianity into his idea of universal cosmic progress. There is for some reason unknown and unknowable, improvement in history. There is progress in the

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genuine spirit of inwardness and self-sufficiency as mankind experiences it. The authentic in man is that which is not yet (*was noch nicht ist*). In striving for that which is not yet, man expects his true beginning. As such he is himself genuine, objective hope.³¹² The idea of forward direction (*Richtung*) is the only unchangeable element in history.³¹³ This idea of direction has been variously expressed by various peoples. Even so it is always recognizable. Man begins with hunger. But this is not the real beginning. The real Genesis is not at the beginning but at the end.³¹⁴ The root of history is the working, creating and recreating man. In striving for the identification of reality with his dreams and in wishing for a “paradise” on earth, he finds he loses himself ever afresh. This is his home (*Heimat*).

(2) Jurgen Moltmann—The Theology of Hope

We turn now to Jurgen Moltmann’s work on *Theology of Hope*. Moltmann’s view offers us a connecting link between those of Bloch and those of Kuitert. Moltmann’s efforts are formally similar to those of Kuitert. Both men want to start with Jesus Christ and the reality of his historical resurrection and make him intelligible to the modern man.

Moltmann and Kuitert agree in thinking that orthodoxy has collapsed; it has no eye for the genuine historical nature of Christianity and of reality as a whole. What we need is a *pro-me* theology of covenant and promise. We need a theology that

³¹² *Ibid.*, p. 1625.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 1627.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1628.



goes beyond Barth and beyond Bultmann in maintaining the genuine historicity of Christ and the resurrection as the one original light from which all other lights derive.

Both men agree that it is only in terms of a *pro-me* theology that we can make Christianity intelligible to modern man.

In the position of Bloch we have a typical expression of the view of modern man. It is an act philosophy. It is a *pro-me* philosophy. It is, in the eyes of Moltmann, the type of philosophy with which a true *pro-me* theology can do business. Both in direct reference to Bloch and in similarity of argument to that of Bloch Moltmann shows his sympathy for the views of Bloch.

Like Bloch, Moltmann's basic category of interpretation of human life is the idea of the future. We must, argues Moltmann, think in terms of an eschatology that is more genuinely open to the God of the future than that of Karl Barth. Barth's words: "If Christianity be not altogether and unreservedly eschatology, there remains in it no relationship whatever to Christ," have no true "futuraity" in them.³¹⁵ Barth still makes the eschaton into a transcendental eternity, the transcendental meaning of all ages, equally near to all the ages of history and equally far from all of them."³¹⁶ Even such men as Bultmann and Paul Althaus "became the victims of a transcendental eschatology which once again

³¹⁵Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, trans. James W. Leitch. New York: Harper & Row. 1967), p. 39.

³¹⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 439–440.

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obscured rather than developed the discovery of early Christian eschatology.” All of these men are still under control of “the thought forms of the Greek mind, which sees in the *logos* the epiphany of the eternal present of being and find the truth in that.”³¹⁷

Moltmann gives particular attention to the views of Wolfhart Pannenberg and his associates.³¹⁸ According to Pannenberg says Moltmann, it is only “in the light of its end” that history can be seen to be revelational of God. Yet in the resurrection of Jesus “there has already happened—what still awaits all men.”³¹⁹

Now it is true that in putting the matter this way Pannenberg’s theology of universal history obviously intends in the first instance to extend and supersede the Greek cosmic theology.³²⁰ However, the Greek principle has not been rejected altogether. The thought structures of Greek cosmic theology remain in principle, and are simply given an eschatological application.³²¹ Kant’s critique of theological metaphysics would apply to such a philosophy of history. God is not really the starting point in Pannenberg’s theology.³²² The revelation of God “which is witnessed in the biblical scriptures is,” still “understood as (epiphany of the eternal present); that describes the God of Parmenides rather than the God of the exodus and the resurrection. The revelation of the risen Christ is not

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 76 ff.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

³²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

³²² *Ibid.*, p. 88.

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a form of this epiphany of the eternal present, but necessitates a view of revelation as apocalypse of the promised future of the truth. In the light of this future of the truth, manifest in the promise, man experiences reality as history in all its possibilities and dangers, and is broken of that fixed view of reality in which it becomes an image of the deity.”³²³

In order really to escape Greek categories we must go beyond Pannenberg, and think of reality as utterly open. Only if we regard reality as so utterly open that no eternity can be related to it and enter into it, how can we do justice to the primacy of Jesus as the light of mankind? Only if we start from the idea of the uniqueness of Christ in terms of the pure futurity of reality can we do justice both to Jesus and his resurrection as lighting up all reality to its bottom. Only then can we bring the death and the resurrection of Jesus into genuine union with one another. “Christian theology speaks of ‘revelation’, when on the ground of the Easter appearances of the risen Lord it perceives and proclaims the identity of the risen one with the crucified one. Jesus is recognized in the Easter appearances as what he really was. That is the ground of faith’s ‘historical’ remembrance of the life and work, claims and sufferings of Jesus of Nazareth.”³²⁴

Only in this way can we see the resurrection of Jesus standing “as a sort of *primum movens* at the head of the process of history. It is by virtue of this revelation that the reality of man and his world becomes ‘historic’, and it is the hope set upon this

³²³ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 84–85.

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revelation that makes all reality inadequate and as such transient and surpassable. It is the *promissio inquieta* that is the true source of Augustine's *cor inquietum*. It is the *promissio inquieta* that will not suffer man's experience of the world to become a self-contained cosmic image of the deity, but keeps our experience of the world open to history."³²⁵

The whole point of Moltmann's argument is that the complete futurity or absolute contingency of reality is correlative to the idea of the historical death and resurrection of Jesus. Revelation as promise requires as it presupposes the historical resurrection of Christ and the absolute futurity of reality.

Now Ernst Bloch also believes in the absolute openness of the universe. He is, accordingly, in a position to understand biblical eschatology as promise. "The God spoken of here is no intra-worldly or extra-worldly God, but the 'God of hope,' Rom 1 5:13 a God with 'future as his essential nature' (as Bloch puts it), as made known in Exodus and in Israelite prophecy, the God whom we therefore cannot really have in us or over us but only before us, who encounters us in his promises for the future, and whom we therefore cannot 'have' either, but can only await in active hope."³²⁶

If the resurrection of Christ is to have its genuine significance as the power that initiates salvation for all men, then as well there must be that quality of openness to all reality. At this basic point Moltmann quotes Bloch as follow: "To hope there belongs the

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.



knowledge that in the outside world life is as unfinished as in the Ego that works in that outside world."³²⁷

Moltmann, therefore, thinks that he has been truer to the Scripture and its concept of covenantal promise than have such men as Barth and Bultmann, Pannenberg and others; while at the same time, he has made the gospel more intelligible to modern man than these theologians have done or do today.

The idea of the resurrection of Christ is that of *creatio ex nihilo*. This idea ties together the teaching of the Old Testament with that of the New Testament. This notion sets off biblical teaching from Greek thinking. But now, modern thinking, and notably Bloch, supports biblical thinking and takes its part over against Greek thinking.³²⁸ Says Moltmann: "Only if the whole historical picture, contingency and continuity and all, could be shown to be in itself not necessary but contingent, should we come with sight of that which can be called the eschatologically new fact of the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection of Christ does not mean a possibility within the world and its history, but a new possibility altogether for the world, for existence and for history. Only when the world can be understood as contingent creation out of the freedom of God and *ex nihilo*—only on the basis of this *contingentia mundi*—does the raising of Christ become intelligible as *nova creatio*. In view of what is meant and what is promised when we speak of the raising

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

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of Christ, it is therefore necessary to expose the profound irrationality of the rational cosmos of the modern, technico-scientific world. By the raising of Christ we do not mean a possible process in world history, but the eschatological process to which world history is subjected.”³²⁹

It is this all-enveloping contingency, Moltmann argues, that enables us, not to move toward the idea of resurrection as a possibility, a probability and then a reality. On the contrary the idea of absolute contingency enables us to start with the fact of the resurrection and then reason toward all other things as deriving their existence and intelligibility from it.

“Then the theology of the resurrection would no longer be fitted in with an existing concept of history, but an attempt would have to be made, in comparison with and in contradistinction to the existing views of history, to arrive at a new understanding of history with the ultimate possibilities and hopes that attach to it on the pre-supposition of the raising of Christ from the dead.”
“Then the resurrection of Christ does not offer itself as an analogy to that which can be experienced any time and anywhere, but as an analogy to what is to come to all. The expectation of what is to come on the ground of the resurrection of Christ, must then turn all reality that can be experienced and all real experience into an experience that is provisional and a reality that does not yet contain within it what is held in prospect for it.”³³⁰

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 179–180.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

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It is thus that our “christological understanding of the message of the kingdom does not distort Jesus’ message of the kingdom, but makes it universal, opens it to embrace a totality of new being. If the kingdom of God begins as it were with a new act of creation, then the Reconciler is ultimately the Creator, and thus the eschatological prospect of reconciliation must mean the reconciliation of the whole creation, and must develop an eschatology of all things. In the cross we can recognize the god-forsakenness of all things, and with the cross we can realize the real absence of the kingdom of God in which all things attain to righteousness, life and peace. Hence the kingdom of God can mean no less than resurrection and new creation, and hope in the kingdom can be satisfied with no less than this.”³³¹

D. Kuitert’s Reevaluation of Death

We are interested now in discovering what way Kuitert’s view of the future resembles that of Moltmann and that of Bloch. Are we putting the matter too sharply if we say that Kuitert’s framework of thought is basically similar to that of Bloch?

We can get to the heart of the matter very quickly if we listen again to what Kuitert says with respect to death. As Reformed Christians we need, says Kuitert, a reevaluation of the problem of death. The traditional view of death, he says, is well expressed in Herman Bavinck’s *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*. According to Bavinck death does not merely follow upon sin but is the punishment for sin. The main

³³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

passages of Scripture to which Bavinck appeals for substantiation of his view are Genesis 2:17; 3:19 and Romans 5:12ff: Death invaded the world created as “very good” by God when man disobeyed God. There was a time, at the beginning of history, when there was no death because there was no sin in the world.³³²

Now we need a reorientation on this point. In the first place the foundation of this traditional position has been destroyed. We can no longer follow the traditional view of the creation, fall and redemption scheme. We can no longer regard this as historical.³³³ Kuitert does not feel the need of establishing this point in this connection. He refers to “the literature” on the subject. He has given us his reasons in his various publications and succinctly in his *Do You Understand What You Read*.³³⁴

Basic to his contention is that on the traditional view we cannot maintain the primacy of Christ. In the case of the traditional view, the truth of Christ is made to depend on the fact of Adam as the first man. We may, with our natural tendency toward conservatism, think that something is lost, if we must do without Adam as an historical person. But we should realize Christians became Christians not because of Adam but because of the message of Jesus Christ. Accordingly faith undergoes no change (no damage) if Adam appears not to have been an historical person at all. The reality of Jesus is not

³³² Kuitert, *Anders Gezegd* pp. 141–142.

³³³ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

³³⁴ Kuitert, *Verstaat Gij Wat Gij Leest?*, p. 27.

supported by what the Bible says about Adam; it stands on its own feet.³³⁵

Besides that, facts are facts and we cannot permanently close our eyes to them. Science has shown that there is no life without death. “The brief conclusion of the matter may be: no death without life and no life without death.”³³⁶

If we still rebel against the “new light” that modern science and theology has brought because of what the apostle Paul says on the subject we reiterate the fact that even in Rom. 5:12 (Rom 5:12) Paul insists on the primacy of Christ. Paul used Adam as a teaching model and teaching-models “need not be historical in order to perform their function.”³³⁷ Paul does not teach the notion that death follows sin in history as a necessity.³³⁸

Paul speaks of death as a power. He tells us that death “reigns as king” which dominates life. In Rom. 5:12 Paul does not speak of biological death but of a complex unity constituting a power (Rom 5:12). What the biologist extracts from this complex unit is a derivative of what is called death in Rom 5:12 (Rom 5:12). This derivative item we may call dying (*sterven*). Paul does not say that dying has come into the world through sin (that dying which has always been there as coexistent with life) because that dying appears only in biology. To give Paul’s meaning we might say that through the knowledge

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

³³⁶ Kuitert, *Anders Gezegd*, p. 143.

³³⁷ Kuitert, *Verstaat Gij Wat Gij Leest?*, p. 28.

³³⁸ Kuitert, *Anders Gezegd*, p. 144.

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of sin the necessity of dying came to expression as death, even as through the knowledge of the promise the rainbow came to be spoken of as covenant-bow.³³⁹ For the sinner dying becomes an impasse; this is not the case of dying as such. We may therefore say that for a creature the necessity of dying carries a positive significance.³⁴⁰ That is to say the necessity of dying is not only a fate but at the same time an opportunity for the completion of being man (*het mens-zijn*) by means of an act.³⁴¹ In this connection he mentions recent Roman Catholic writers. And does not the Heidelberg Catechism speak of death as a passageway to eternal life?

It remains only to place the death of man in its broadest cosmological perspective. We must relate the necessity of dying that faces human beings into the perspective of cosmic development. We may call our time a restricted or limited time (Barth's *befristete Zeit*) and think of it as a means by which we accomplish personal completion. But then this ideal of personal completion must be subordinated to the ideal of the completion of the human race as a whole. We must regard it as a challenge to disappear in the interest of those who come after us. We must thus desire to serve those who come after us as best we can. Do not those who donate their organs at death to others serve as an illustration of such an attitude?³⁴²

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 150.

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On this point Christians and non-Christians can agree. In addition the Christian has the joy of the appearance of Jesus Christ “who through his liberating work turns away the obstruction which threatens development.” Our sin against God’s purpose “is in fact regression.” Because of this liberating work of Christ the Christian “believes in the future.”³⁴³

When we read all this we wonder how Kuitert would be able to distinguish his view of man and the world from the view of Ernst Bloch. There is apparently the same view of pure contingency underlying the position of Kuitert as well as that of Bloch. Out of this pure contingency springs everything new, both evil and good. But the good will eventually prevail over evil. This must be so because man is good and he wants the good to prevail. Man constructs for himself the ideal of a God who is even better than man and who will through unlimited power establish a kingdom of righteousness for himself and for all men. This will mean *Heimat* for all that want it, and strive for it. Together with other organizers of religious groups Jesus did a great deal to help forward the progress of mankind on its way to its “eternal” home.

Moltmann is in basic agreement with Bloch. However, he attributes a greater initiative to Jesus than Bloch does. He even attributes “absolute” origination of the good to Jesus. But then all men as men participate in this “absolute” origination. That participation constitutes their manhood. Barth’s *pro-*

³⁴³ *Ibid.*

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me theology requires his God in his freedom to turn into the opposite of himself in the interest of taking up all men into participation with his “aseity.” In seeking to go beyond Barth in his actualization of the incarnation, Moltmann desires to erase the last remnants of Greek thinking that remain in Barth really in order to start *von oben* and make the resurrection the being from which all beings, that are really beings, spring and the light from which all lights, that are really light, derive.

How does Kuitert’s view differ from that of Bloch or of that of Moltmann? In particular how does Kuitert’s view of the “future” differ from that of Bloch or of Moltmann? With Bloch and Moltmann Kuitert presupposes the framework of modern post-Kantian philosophy. His great joy over the “discovery” of the “historical consciousness” is that of freedom from God’s all-controlling wisdom and power, the freedom of pure autonomy. With this idea of pure autonomy goes that of pure contingency as the absolute freedom from God of all the “facts” of the past, the present, and the future. With this idea of pure autonomy goes that of an abstract principle of the Good as the ideal in terms of which man attains his victory over evil at last. But this “at last” is an ever on-going ideal lest man, in his success in overcoming the evil aspect of contingency should destroy contingency itself and man would be absorbed and lost in being.

E. Summary of Kuitert’s Views

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In concluding our section on Kuitert we summarize his views as found in the books discussed.

(1) Kuitert's View of God

Kuitert says that he is correcting the traditional orthodox view of God and his relation to man by a study of Scriptural exegesis.³⁴⁴ Traditional orthodoxy did not start with Scripture. Its procedure was speculative. In line with Plato orthodox theology attempted to attain conceptual knowledge of the essence of God as he exists in himself. "Constitutive for the being of God as God is not love, fatherhood, personality etc., but absoluteness in the sense of aseity." It was not the God in his acts of revelation that distinguishes God from everything that is not God. "The divinity is the aseity. *Aseitatem deus est.*"³⁴⁵

We turn away from such idle speculation to Scripture. In Scripture there is no theoretical speculation about God apart from his *beneficia*. "We may formulate the matter as follows: in his deeds and words of God's good pleasure (*welbehagen*) the writers of Scripture meet the real being of God. Barth has discovered the proper formula when he says: *Gottes Sein in der Tat.*" In his words and deeds God reveals himself to be the covenant-partner with man. We may continue to speak of the essence of Jehovah if only we realize that we now have a new

³⁴⁴ Kuitert, *De Mensvormigheid Gods*, p. 235.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

approach and a new delineation of what God's essence is.³⁴⁶

Having done forever with the "substance-problematic" of traditional speculative theology we speak of God as man's covenant-partner (*Bondgenoot*).³⁴⁷ As such God cannot be made into a scientific object.³⁴⁸ "A God '*an sich*', such as we heard Kuyper speak of him, we do not find in Scripture and a proper theology dare not mention." "The only, genuine true God is the Partner-God of Israel. Such is his name to all eternity."³⁴⁹

(2) Kuitert's View of Man

Secondly as Scripture knows no God *an sich*, so also it knows no man *an sich*. As God's essence is expressed in his covenant-relation with Israel so man's essence is expressed in his covenant-relation with God.³⁵⁰ We must without hesitation speak of the identity of God's being with his revelation.³⁵¹ Similarly we must without hesitation identify man's being with his being the covenant partner of God. "God is for Israel, strictly taken as *mensvormig* because man is *God-vormig*." It is this *usus israeliticus* that enlightens us on the true nature of man. This is what we mean when we say that man is the image of God. What makes man is

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

expressed in Scripture by this idea of the image of God as the covenant-partner of God.³⁵²

As we cannot speak speculatively of God so we cannot speak speculatively of man. As God is God in act, so man is man in act. And how else could we speak in this manner of the act character of both God and man unless we began with man? It is not God who is anthropomorph but man who is theomorph.³⁵³ This fact implies that man has found his “way back” to God. It is only the Israelitish man that has thus found the way back. Only he could therefore speak properly of God’s being as analogous to the being of man.³⁵⁴

It is only if we thus begin with true Israelitish principle of self interpretation that we can leave behind us the ineffable, wholly unknowable God of traditional theology. “The being of God as Israel’s covenant-God includes his being known by Israel.” The Godness of God (*het God-zijn van God*) includes his being known. It is this that the idea of the man-formity of God (*mensvormigheid Gods*) wants, in the last analysis to teach us.³⁵⁵ It is in the act of response, i.e., of covenant obedience that man is authentically man. Man is man as God’s covenant-partner.

(3) Kuitert’s View of Christ

³⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 278.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

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Kuitert has not written extensively on his view of Christ. What he says, however, is in accord with his general idea that the relation between God and man is that of covenant. And Jesus Christ, is the central point of covenant-interaction between God and man. Barth says that God is what he is in his revelation, i.e., in his act of saving all men. In Christ God changes wholly and without residue into the opposite of himself and then takes all men up into participation in his aseity. It is this that constitutes history. History is the Christ-Event and the Christ-Event is history.³⁵⁶

Kuitert's framework of thought is, as noted, similar to that of Barth. He sets his own act-theology squarely over against that of Bavinck.³⁵⁷ He does this in terms of his covenant theology. And his Christ is, of course, the center of this covenant-theology. The history of Israel led by Israel's God culminates in the history of Jesus Christ as representative of the God of Israel in the midst of Israel.³⁵⁸

Jesus Christ is the unique representative of the God of the covenant. In the facts that take place about Jesus mankind's "guilt in relation to the chaos of the world takes place."³⁵⁹ There is an undoubted facticity about the events centering about

³⁵⁶ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* 3, 2:81. "Wie die Geschichte der göttlichen Rettung für alle und jeden Menschen ganz und gar und ausschliesslich Er ist, so ist Er ganz und gar und ausschliesslich die Geschichte der göttlichen Rettung für alle und jeden Menschen. Er ist selbst diese Geschichte."

³⁵⁷ Kuitert, *Anders Gezegd*, p. 141.

³⁵⁸ Kuitert, *De Realiteit van het geloof*, p. 176.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 163.



Jesus.³⁶⁰ Science quite properly deals with these facts. But science cannot adequately set forth the significance of them.³⁶¹ He who deals with these facts in a neutral scientific manner says too little.³⁶²

The meaning must come, in the last analysis, from Jesus himself. A theology based on existential philosophy cannot do full justice to the genuine historicity and therefore to the genuine uniqueness of Jesus. Its view of Jesus is too largely dependent on its concept of man as free in the Kantian sense of the term. To see the true uniqueness of Jesus as the ultimate subject of revelation we must go beyond Pannenberg. Pannenberg gives us, in the last analysis, something like a self-interpreting history.³⁶³ For the same reason we must go beyond Moltmann. The message of the resurrection of Jesus is a message to which there is no analogy in our reality although it has become reality in our old world.³⁶⁴ For all his attempt to start with Christ and to interpret all things in terms of Christ, Moltmann cannot do full justice to the significance of the historical death and resurrection of Christ. After all is said and done Moltmann does not really accomplish what he sets out to do, namely, to interpret reality in terms of the resurrection of Christ. This is the case because for him the resurrection of Christ lies “beyond nature and history.” Moltmann, like the existentialists in general, continues to adjust his view

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 183.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

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of the resurrection to a view of reality that allows no room for it.³⁶⁵

We need, says Kuitert, to start by saying that “something happened.” There are things in Scripture that need not have happened. Other things Scripture simply relates as history. “And there is one narrative in Scripture, namely the narrative of the death and resurrection of the cross and resurrection of Jesus, of which the apostle Paul asserts that its having happened is a constitutive part of the kernel of what Christianity is. “The that and the what of the resurrection are immediately involved in one another. Herein lies the uniqueness of this event. “The happening of the resurrection is so unique that our world has till now, experienced it only once.”³⁶⁶

We note in passing that at this critical point Kuitert injects a bit of “orthodoxy” into his theological amalgam. It is apparently a measure of desperation. When men like Fuchs and Ebeling, the new-questers, and Pannenberg and Moltmann keep going beyond and still further beyond Barth and Bultmann; then the idea that Christ is only a projection in the realm of the purely ineffable will not down. A Christ who is “*jenseits*” nature and history—what will Feuerbach say of him? Kuitert apparently sees himself with the prodigal at the swine-trough. Return then to the Father’s house? Not yet! I would have to submit to the authority of the Father; I would have no freedom and no future. I have demythologized the narrative of the creation-fall-and redemption of my forebears, Calvin,

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

³⁶⁶ Kuitert, *Verstaat Gij War Gij Leest?* p. 72.

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Kuyper, Bavinck, as being speculative. When Paul says, all men are covenant-breakers because the first man Adam at the beginning of history rebelled against God I know that this cannot be true. How can I be a sinner unless I know that I have transgressed the law of God, unless I know God? And how can I know God unless I participate in his being and unless he participates in mine? And how can God participate in my being unless he participates with me as I strive to attain authenticity of being? How can God be of help to me except he be more successful than I in overcoming his sin against contingency and carries me on his back with him?

In short Kuitert finds himself in an impasse. He has boldly joined modern man in his futile effort to interpret himself and his world in terms of himself as the final point of reference. What can I know? What must I do? For what can I hope? Kuitert has answered all three of these questions by means of the principle of the idea that God and man together emerge from the realm of pure contingency and are on the way toward a happy ending. He has bought a ticket on the modern freedom train. Approaching the last station, which for man spells absorption and reabsorption into chaos, Kuitert tries to jump off the train. But such a feat is beyond the agility of any man. He knows he is at the swine-trough. For all that he will not return to the father's home! He wants to eat of the dainties of the father's home after he has spurned the father's love and having illegitimately taken the father's substance. He thinks he has a right to his inheritance after he has spent it in riotous living. He wants to escape from the wrath

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to come in history, at the judgment day, and in ordinary history, the way Bavinck thought of it. But he does not want the framework of Scriptural teaching in terms of which alone such a transition would have any meaning. He has committed himself to a form of the phenomena-noumena scheme of Kant. This is the scheme in terms of which Barth developed his idea of the Christ-Event. It is the scheme by which Fuchs and Ebeling, the questers, and Pannenberg and Moltmann want to go beyond Barth and Bultmann. Each time the Christ-Event becomes both more rationalistic and at the same time irrationalistic. For Barth God is hidden and at the same time wholly revealed in the phenomenal realm. Each time the ethical dualism becomes more ethical (vs. intellectual) and more dualistic and each time the ethical monism becomes more monistic. Each time the Christ of the Christ-Event becomes a more strictly contentless interaction point between pure determinism and pure indeterminism. Each time it becomes more meaningless to say that all things must be interpreted in terms of such a Christ.

Now then, apparently sensing the coming nemesis Kuitert, as it were, calls out to Luther, to Calvin, to Kuyper and Bavinck as he gets a glimpse of them as passengers on the train streaking past him in the opposite direction. Please, oh please, give me the benefit of the heart of your theology, the escape from wrath to grace in history through the self-attesting Christ of Scripture. You say I can't have the heart unless I take the whole organism of which it is a part? Can't we perform a heart-transplant? Do you expect me to take into the bargain all the

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abracadabra that goes with the Chalcedon creed, the decrees of Dordt or the Westminster Confession? Must I with Augustine speak of a city of God as opposed by the city of man? Must I with Kuyper speak of an antithesis between those for whom Christ died and those for whom he did not die? Must I speak with Vollenhoven of the necessity of a Christian methodology? May I not continue with my new found friend, speak of the realm of science as disproving all these things and then as pointing toward a realm of ethical freedom above? But, what's happening to me? Even as I plead with you to give me your Christ, the Christ of a real historical tradition from the wrath of God to acceptance with him I am still worshipping the Christ who is both wholly beyond and wholly within history. Please, please help me my friends!

If I should be wrong in worshipping the Christ-Event,—and we must all always think of reality as wholly questionable—then the wrath of the Lamb abides on me. Must I then really choose between the Christ of Paul, of Augustine, of Calvin and the Christ of Kant? Please help me, my friends.

(4) Kuitert's View of Scripture

Kuitert's view of Scripture naturally fits in with and is, in fact, involved in, his view of Christ.

In the case of his view of Scripture as well as in his view of Christ, Kuitert closely follows Barth. For Barth the Bible is the Word of God as Jesus is the Son of God. In both cases the 'is' is to be taken in an activist sense. In Christ God is wholly revealed.

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There is an indirect identification between God and man in Christ. Revelation is historical but history is never as such, i.e., directly, revelational.

This way of putting the question of Christ and of Scripture meets the requirements of the modern I-it, I-thou scheme of things.

On the basis of it Jesus as human and the Scripture as written partake of the relativity that marks the realm of the phenomenal. God cannot speak directly to man in the phenomenal. There can be no direct revelation in nature, in history, or in the created consciousness of man. How could there? Nature, history, and the constitution of man's conscious[ness] are for man only what they are made to be by man. Moreover, all that God reveals himself to be to man can be nothing else to him than what he thinks God must be to him. In short, all intellectual effort on the part of man, is necessarily effected at the expense of the uniqueness of that effort with which it concerns itself. Carried to ultimate success, Parmenides was right in saying, that it would lead to the absorption of all individuality, whether "subjective" or "objective" into abstract, eternal, changeless being.

Because Kant was aware of this, he insisted that time or change must be taken as inherently irreducible to thinking. Individuality in man and in his world is due to pure contingency. Accordingly anything said by anyone in history, must be thought of as the correlative interaction between abstract rationality and abstract irrationality. This fact

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corresponds to and is, in the last analysis, identical with Christ as wholly hidden and wholly revealed.

It appears to be his commitment to some such positions as this that underlies his struggle to say something intelligible about Scripture.

He rejects the orthodox view of Scripture as through the agency of the Holy Spirit and the apostles being directly identifiable as the word of God. Such an idea would fit in with the orthodox notion of a God-in-himself and a man-in-himself. Such an idea would be scholastic, and intellectualistic. Kuitert assumes that Reformed Protestant as well as Roman Catholic theologians have held and do hold to an essentially Greek view of the nature of the relation of God to man.

How would modern man, now that he has, with Kant, discovered the historical character of man and his cosmos, ever accept such a view? Kuitert appears not to realize that it is modern post-Kantian thinkers, not Calvin and his followers, who are the legitimate heirs to the Greeks. Kant's view of the nature of the intellect is as legislature with respect to what can and cannot exist as is the view of Parmenides. All that Kant and his followers have done is to add the idea of pure contingency to that of pure determinism and therefore the idea of pure irrationalism to that of pure rationalism. This was done in the interest of keeping man from being swallowed up by his own principle of identification.

Obviously meaningless as it is to have the very nature of man consisting in the interaction point of

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two mutually destructive principles, this is the view of man and the cosmos that springs from the historical consciousness. It is to this fatality that Kuitert has committed himself both in his doctrine about Christ and in his doctrine about Scripture.

We have seen how he asks his orthodox friends to give him the benefit of the work of Christ, without accepting the Christ who procures the benefit. In similar fashion he asks his friends to give him a bit of direct revelation about Christ in Scripture while he maintains the principle that no such revelation can obtain in the phenomenal world. The Bible has come, says Kuitert, to tell us of the wondrous transition that has come from the death and resurrection of Christ for all mankind.³⁶⁷ But then it must not be the Bible itself that, on its own absolute authority, says what the nature of this transition is. The Bible itself says that we cannot simply say that something has happened because the Bible says it has. But “the Bible says at the same time that faith is empty if certain things have not happened. How then must we proceed?” We have already seen that in his book on the reality of the faith he says that our starting point must be with tradition rather than with Scripture, because Scripture cannot be the judge in its own case. Inasmuch as all reality—God and man—is historical, continuity must be sought in a God who goes along with man as the principle of continuity in history; and in the nature of the case, only tradition, not a static revelation given once for all, can tell us about such a God.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

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C. S. U. Zuidema

We turn now to an earlier graduate of the Free University of Amsterdam, Dr. S. U. Zuidema.

Dr. Zuidema's publication began with a two volume dissertation on *De Philosophie Van Occam in Gijn Commentaar op de Sententien*. This dissertation was written under the direction of Dr. H. Th. Vollenhoven, who with Dr. Herman Dooyeweerd, began the movement for a Christian and, more particularly, a Calvinistic philosophy in 1926. Zuidema became an extremely capable expositor of this philosophy (*De Wijsbegeerte de Wetsidee*). In the course of time he has concerned himself deeply with existentialist philosophy and with the theology of such men as Barth and Bultmann. More recently he has written a number of articles on the New Hermeneutic and especially on the hermeneutic of H. M. Kuitert.

Our aim is to ascertain the way in which Zuidema's evaluation of the New Hermeneutic differs from that of Kuitert.

In an article dealing with Kuitert's book *The Reality of the Faith*, Zuidema points out that Kuitert has allowed himself to be carried away with modern existentialist thinking, especially with its notion of the historicity of man and his world, without taking note of what the *Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee* has done by way of showing the bankruptcy of existentialism.

1. Zuidema's Starting Point

In contrast with Kuitert, Zuidema begins his thinking about any and every problem with the Christ of the Scriptures. The Christ of the Scripture identifies himself directly in the Scripture. Belief in Scripture lies, as Calvin points out, above and beyond all reasoning of men. This is the case, not because it is faith but because it is faith in Scripture.

People may tell us that such a position commits us to reasoning in a circle. For you men will say: the “Bible is the Word of God, because it is the Word of God, and because the Word of God is the Word of God.” We reply that in believing the Bible as self-attesting we do not engage in circular reasoning because we do not engage in reasoning at all. The Bible does not stand on the level with the logical principle of identity. In short we accept the Bible on authority.³⁶⁸

Of course, Zuidema argues that the acceptance of Christ as attesting to Scripture, and of Scripture as attesting to Christ, are involved in one another. And, of course, the acceptance of Scripture is not a formal principle that operates regardless of the content of Scripture, and therefore regardless of the purpose of Scripture. Scripture is God’s interpretation of himself and of his relation to man and his world. “There are no naked facts.” We are confronted with an “amazing reality, in which man and the world

⁵Van Til, C. (1974). *The New Hermeneutic*. The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company: Phillipsburg, NJ.

³⁶⁸ S. U. Zuidema, *De Christus der Schriften en oecumenische theologie* (Amsterdam: Buijten en Schipperheijn, 1965), pp. 11–12.

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participate—.” According to the revelation of Scripture this reality is under the judgment of God because of the fall of Adam. The power of sin permeates the deepest movements of our human existence. It affects our knowledge of ourselves, of our fellow-man, and of the reality in which we have been placed as God’s creatures. Above all this power cuts the ties that bind us to God. We are now marked by lovelessness, by revolutionary hate, by indifferent negation, by self-love sought in a humanness without God—by an unwillingness to listen to the voice of God as it calls “My son, give me thy heart.” With all our enmities, we never show enmity against sin.³⁶⁹

How then can we, of ourselves, understand who Christ is, and what he came to do? And how can we really understand any problem in any field properly? Jesus said: “The world hates me because I witness of her that her works are evil” (Jn 7:7). None of us can tolerate Christ as he unmasks us in our sin, as he diagnoses our disease as being “unto death.” Christ knew that no man would accept him for what he was and had come to do unless by his Spirit he gave them a new heart, a heart to love instead of to hate.³⁷⁰ But then to give men only light but also, with it, the power of sight, to give men love instead of hate was part of the work he came to do. He gives to men a joy in proclaiming the fact that there is no other name given under heaven by which they must be saved? They now rest assured that the powers of hell cannot prevail against the kingdom Christ has come to establish on earth. With Augustine they now

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

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see that the kingdom of Christ consists of his control of all the course of history by the power of his redeeming work.

Thus there is no preaching of Christ, no preaching of salvation, and no preaching of the gospel except it be preaching in consonance with Scripture-teaching.

2. Zuidema on Modern “Humanism”

Zuidema characterizes modern thought as being humanistic. And the chief characteristic of humanism is that it is man-centered. It is based on the idea of man as free, i.e., independent of the ordinances of God. Humanism assumes that there are no such ordinances. The world is just there. It is there for man to make it what he pleases.

In other words, according to humanism, his world and his God are in principle diametrically the opposite of what Calvin, on the basis of Paul, says they are. The battle of Armageddon is on. Apostate man uses modern weapons now in order to destroy the kingdom which Christ came to establish on earth. Yet Christ is victor; humanism is bound to show forth its own internal futility. Humanism must, of necessity, affirm God, even while denying him. The prodigal is spending his unearned substance fast. Soon he will be at the swine-trough, still stubbornly unwilling to return.

It is the business of a Christian, and more particularly of a Calvinistic university to challenge modern humanism at every sector of the front.

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It is of special importance that a biblical philosophy be developed which can sustain and direct the army of Christ as it claims every inch of territory of earth for Christ as king.

A. The Philosophy of Occam

In particular the history of philosophy must be set forth in the light of biblical principles. In his work on Calvinism and the Reformation of Philosophy Dr. Vollenhoven had outlined a course that might profitably be followed.³⁷¹

The Christian must enter sympathetically into the problematics of modern humanism. He realizes that except for the grace of God he would himself still be enmeshed in them. Zuidema begins his work in the analysis and critique of modern humanism by a careful and detailed study of the philosophy of William of Occam.

We can do no more than intimate something of Zuidema's approach in dealing with Occam.

Occam starts his philosophical thinking with man as ultimate. Occam's teaching with respect to God and his work is a "subdivision of his teaching with respect to man and his work."³⁷² Occam's god is a "cosmological and more especially a humanistic god." He is not the God of the Scriptures, because he is a cosmological god. "In accordance with the

³⁷¹ D. H. Th. Vollenhoven, *Het Calvinisme en de Reformatie van de Wyssbegeerk*, (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1933.)

³⁷² S. U. Zuidema, *De Philosophie Van Occam in Zijn Commentaar op de Sententien* (Hilversum: Schipper, 1936), p. 447.

whole of gnosticism, which is always humanistic, the cosmological concept of god is developed as humanistic. Accordingly the essence of god stands on a level with the *ánima intellectíva* of man, and of the nature of angels.”³⁷³

Occam’s god is made in the image of the “free man, whose image and whose nostalgia is lawlessness.” “God is the ‘*Uebersensch.*’” His essence is pure indeterminate will. His view of god may therefore be called “humanistic-voluntaristic.” Man is *homo absconditus*; accordingly God is *deus absconditus*.

This *deus absconditus* is omnipotent. His dominion is without limit, except in relation to man’s will and in relation to the law of contradiction.³⁷⁴

This meager suggestion must suffice to indicate Zuidema’s evaluation of Occam’s philosophy. Occam is a forerunner of modern humanism. The idea of the free or autonomous human personality enveloping God with the notion of pure contingency and using the law of contradiction as correlative to pure contingency in order thus to dispose of the God of Scripture indicates the very nature of modern humanism and existentialism.

B. Pioneers of Humanism

Coming to modern times we note what Zuidema has to say on the first modern humanists. As editor of a book on *Pioneers of Humanism* Zuidema

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 451.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 454–455.

speaks of the development of modern humanism. The earliest form of modern humanism is well represented by Erasmus. Erasmus was not ready to throw out the Bible altogether. He sought for a sort of Christian humanism. In modern times humanism has worked out consistently the principle already controlling earlier humanism, i.e., the autonomy of man. Current humanism wants to be post-Christian. Says Zuidema: "The movement from Erasmus to the Humanistic Covenant signifies a development in an increasing de-christianising and radicalising of what was from the beginning the moving force of humanism; the declaration of human autonomy and the (nothing less and nothing other than) religious autonomy of the faith-content and faith-experience of the humanist."

More recently humanism has cut itself loose from all relationship with Christianity. Ludwig Feuerbach's humanism is frankly anti-Christian. To be truly humanistic one must not only be anti-Christian but atheistic.³⁷⁵

According to Feuerbach one who adheres to Christianity thereby proves himself to be an opponent of the true progress of the human race. Feuerbach seeks to enlighten those who do not realize how obstructive to true progress they are by their belief in the supernatural and, in particular, the miraculous. Man must create his culture and, in doing so, create and redeem himself.

Working in the line of Kant Feuerbach seeks to go further than Kant. Kant has not altogether burned

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

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out the remnants of Christianity from his thinking. Christianity constitutes a basic attack on the idea of man's free personality. In the name of the latter the former must be destroyed.³⁷⁶

Feuerbach's thinking develops along the lines of post-Kantian personalist philosophy. He who knows himself truly does so in relation to his fellow man. Man is, inherently, a social or community being.³⁷⁷

Humanism is bound to be the philosophy of the future, it is the philosophy of man's true love for his fellow-man.³⁷⁸

It is thus that Feuerbach caricatures Christianity and then rejects it.

Zuidema finds that recent humanism is aggressive in his country. In his country, the Netherlands, modernists have formed a society which they call the "Humanistic Covenant."³⁷⁹ The men of this organization simply start with the "post-Christian man."³⁸⁰ Post-Christian man rejects Christianity in the interest of his noble morality. He wants to improve the earth for the benefit of man.³⁸¹ No truly moral and rational man will waste his time on anything else.³⁸²

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 195.

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It is thus that Zuidema traces the “Christian humanism” of Erasmus of Rotterdam to the anti-Christian humanism of Feuerbach. The humanism of both of these men is man-centered. The renaissance man, with his assumption of man’s freedom from God the creator-redeemer of men, and freedom to build his own kingdom, the kingdom of man in a purely contingent world, comes to increasingly consistent self-expression till it is openly and avowedly anti-Christian and anti-theistic.

3. Zuidema on Modern Existentialism

What has been said about Zuidema’s view of humanism may serve as a background for what he says on Existentialism.

As there is a Christian humanism that develops into an atheistic, anti-Christian-humanism, so there is a Christian Existentialism that develops into an atheistic, anti-Christian existentialism.

A. The Christian Existentialism of Søren Kierkegaard

Søren Kierkegaard is the great Christian Existentialist.

In his work on Contemporary Thinkers Zuidema is concerned with the spiritual life of the twentieth century.³⁸³ There has been a reaction against nineteenth century thinking in the interest of

³⁸³ S. U. Zuidema, *Denkers van Deze Tijd* (Franeker: T. Wever, n.d.), p. 7.

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irrationalism. The nineteenth century forerunners of this irrationalism are Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. In the volume mentioned Zuidema writes a long essay on Kierkegaard and Dr. H. Van Riessen writes on Nietzsche whom he speaks of as the “radical humanist.”

We listen to what Zuidema says about Kierkegaard as the forerunner of twentieth century Existentialism.

Kierkegaard is a Christian-Existentialist. This implies that he is concerned with God as well as with man. But Kierkegaard’s god is a projection of man. His deepest concern is the eternalization of himself as man. In it his “salvation” consists.

Man’s passion for eternalization is, at the same time his self-realization, and this self-realization must be accomplished by the process of internalization.

In this process of internalization man is and must remain a mystery not only to others but also to himself. Man is the *homo absconditus*. “Man does not merely have a mystery but he is a mystery. Man is the hidden one, the *homo absconditus*, which no one understands, and who has no grasp on himself as free.” Kierkegaard’s view of man as absolutely free is, therefore, “in principle atheistic, in spite of all the good intentions of the author.”³⁸⁴

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

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Thus Kierkegaard lifts man out of his creaturely relations as set forth in Scripture.³⁸⁵ Man's activity must be marked by pure negativity, an emptying out of himself into the eternal.³⁸⁶ The life of faith consists of man's detemporalizing himself into well, into what?

Of course, Kierkegaard would say, into God and into God as revealed in Christ. Christian faith is Christian faith only if it corresponds to God's historical becoming, to the revelational fact of the incarnation."³⁸⁷

In the incarnation we have the history of God's history and man's history. In this "history" of God's history and man's history, God takes the initiative and provides the continuity. It is this that constitutes "Kierkegaard's 'subjective' and 'paradoxical' (his) 'subjective-paradoxical' thinking."³⁸⁸

Says Zuidema: "With the Absolute Paradox of his mythologized Christian doctrine of the incarnation—reconstructed into the doctrine of the eternally becoming God—a pseudo—the agony—Kierkegaard connects directly the suffering on the cross and the death of Christ, and faith in the forgiveness of sins in the blood of Christ. On this basis God as History means that God directs himself to man as forgiving his sins and does not want to meet man otherwise than as the God who forgives sins in Christ, the God of all grace." It is only when

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

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Kierkegaard has reached this point that he is where he wants to be. “To become a Christian consists in one’s acceptance of the grace of forgiveness in the confrontation of the appearance of God in the Absolute Paradox.”³⁸⁹

It is by means of the “myth of the history of the developing God and his appearance of this developing God between the birth and death of Christ,”³⁹⁰ that Kierkegaard wants to save Christianity from the all-enveloping death-embrace of Hegelianism. Hegel mediated Christ to death. He had no place for the really unique manifestation of the God of history in the history of man. If we are to escape the sickening breath of the “system” we must say that “God’s revelation in Christ is a ‘fact’ that repudiates itself, a fact, that cannot be a fact, and as impossible, nevertheless is a fact. It is, namely, the absurd fact, that God becomes man, that eternity becomes time, the infinite finite, the absolute relative, the transcendent immanent, the self-existent becomes history.”³⁹¹

What shall we say of this history of the History of God and of the history of man? Zuidema says we must call it “anti-historical historicism.” After all does not Kierkegaard consider the history of the past, of that which “has happened” to be irrelevant to the life of faith, to the meeting of man with God? Ordinary history is, for Kierkegaard, at most, an “unreal and existentially insignificant deposit of man’s existential self-internalization or an ‘ambiguous’ sign of the

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p. 46.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

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behind its 'having happened' something has taken place on a existentially-internal plateau."³⁹² "It is this anti-historical historicism that will reappear later in existential philosophy and in dialectical theology ..."
Both movements may appeal to Kierkegaard in justification of their views.³⁹³ "Kierkegaard does not permit his individualistic view of man to be corrected by the biblical revelation with respect to man, nor by the dogma of Reformation orthodoxy but, on the contrary he manipulates and misforms the Bible and its dogma till its content—in dialectical paradoxical fashion—conforms with his own individualism."³⁹⁴

With his notion of man's autonomous freedom and self-transcendence Kierkegaard has secularized the categories of Christianity. "In this way Kierkegaard himself, before any such thing as an existentialist like Heidegger and Jaspers existed, secularized Christianity and Christian categories,"³⁹⁵ Christianity is reduced to an aspect of the autonomous man's self-realization through internalization.

B. Non-Christian Existentialism

1. Karl Jaspers

Zuidema has made a very careful and detailed study of the non-Christian existentialist philosophers

³⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 31.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

of recent times. We turn first to what he has to say about the existentialism of Karl Jaspers.

Karl Jaspers concerned himself a great deal with the problem of communication. Accordingly when he deals with Karl Jaspers Zuidema writes on Existentialist Communication.

To understand Jasper's view of communication we must take note of the underlying presuppositions on which it is built.

The first of these is the "experience of freedom." This experience of freedom cannot be communicated. Man's deepest freedom "lies beyond the grasp of all conceptual knowledge, i.e. Consciousness as such (*das Bewusstsein Uberhaupt*)." "It is an experience which transcends the objective and *gegenstandliche* concepts of human thought." "The verbal articulation of the word 'experience of freedom' transcends its own articulation and in any case intends something else than that which one by conceptual analysis may think it to be."³⁹⁶

Jasper's second presupposition is that man's freedom is bestowed. As man must realize that his freedom is absolutely unrestricted so he must also realize that "this unconditioned freedom has been given him. Man must realize that he derives this from himself but not through himself. He must realize that he is able to remain outside of himself

³⁹⁶ S. U. Zuidema, "Existentialist Communication," *Christian Perspectives* (Hamilton, Ontario: Guardian Publishing Company. Ltd., 1961), p. 160.

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simply because the gift of freedom can be absent. Existential freedom means that man stands in a relationship to himself and thereby to his own transcendency.” The “freedom of being oneself in positing one’s self comes to us as a gift of the Transcendent. More exists than man and the world: there is also the Transcendent which is neither man nor world. Whoever would contradict this falls into an immanentism which contradicts itself and disparages man.”³⁹⁷

Here we already have the main elements of Jaspers’ philosophy. How does man relate the unconditioned character of his freedom to its absolute givenness by the Transcendent?

It is obvious that an attempt to relate the Transcendent to man conceptually would lead to flat contradiction. The true relationship between man and the Transcendent must, therefore, be a matter of faith. Yet this faith must be a philosophical faith. It must be a faith that can and must serve as the ultimate presupposition which makes prediction intelligible. Says Zuidema: “Jaspers’ proposition that God, the godhead of the Transcendent, exists, is the content of philosophical faith; and should man ever relinquish this presupposition, an end would be made to all philosophy and philosophizing.” Again: “For Jaspers this philosophical faith is beyond discussion. This faith cannot therefore become a subject for communication, since this faith first makes communication possible in enabling man to be man and conscious of his being. For this

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

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Transcendent is Being, real Being.” Man has being inasmuch as he comes in touch with the Transcendent. “*Eine Berührung der Transcendenz.*” Man’s entire Odyssey “exists by permission of the original, unassailable, unsinkable, never threatened: the Transcendent exists.”³⁹⁸

The problem now is how Jasper can harmonize his irrationalist idea of pure or contingent notion of man’s freedom and his rationalist or determinist idea of the absolute dependence of this freedom.

How can Jaspers “communicate with his contemporaries about the thorny question,” of how to relate the idea of man as “coming out from himself and being his own origin and his own Lord and Master, who allows no one and nothing to legislate to him—how can this be interwoven with the experience of one’s own freedom as having been given and willed by the Transcendent?”³⁹⁹ And: where does this self-revelation of the Transcendent, which must be distinguished from the revelation of human freedom to the self as freedom which is self-originating come from?

Zuidema answers this question by saying: “By relying on this religion (Biblical religion) and by secularizing it, Jaspers is able to get a grasp of the Transcendent. Without this support all philosophy and, according to Jaspers, all philosophical faith, would disappear.”⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

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We cannot follow Zuidema further in his analysis of Jaspers' notion of communication. It amounts to the assumption made over and over by modern man that all prediction refers and must refer to the principle of man's inward self-sufficiency and that of this inward self-sufficiency man can say nothing, either to himself or to any one else.

2. *Martin Heidegger*

The hermeneutical significance of Jasper's philosophy is plain. It is to the effect that in this philosophy, as is typical of modern existentialist philosophy, apostate thinking has run into a *cul de sac*. Assuming man's autonomy, together with the ideas of pure contingency and abstract form, apostate thinking has demonstrated to the world that its rejection of God has resulted in its own crucifixion.

The same thing must be said of Martin Heidegger. And Heidegger's philosophy is of more direct importance for the problem of recent hermeneutics. We may learn what this significance is from two of Zuidema's articles on Heidegger. The first is "The Meaning of Death in Heidegger."⁴⁰¹ For Heidegger the idea of death stands for pure contingency. Can contingency be more pure than it is in the philosophy of Occam, of Kierkegaard, or of Jaspers.⁴⁰² He who would grasp what real contingency means must dig deeper than the layer

⁴⁰¹ S. U. Zuidema, "De Dood Bij Heidegger," *Philosophia Reformata* 12 (1947), pp. 49-66.

⁴⁰² Zuidema deals with Sartre in a separate article but we need not discuss what he says in it.

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of reality found in the realm of surface phenomenal relations. He must descend from the realm of intellectual relations into the wholly other realm of person to person relations. Only in this deeper realm does man know himself as authentic and as inauthentic.

Heidegger's philosophy is therefore, an attempt to overcome pragmatism with its surface phenomenalist interpretation of man and his world.⁴⁰³ Pragmatism cannot do justice to man's being as free and therefore as self-transcendent. Pragmatism does not allow man to enter into the pure world of absolute freedom. Pragmatism deals only with unauthentic man.⁴⁰⁴ To be authentic man is to be free unto death (*frei zum Tode.*) Only he who is free unto death is in the truth. Heidegger's philosophy "no longer concerns itself with God and his ordinances" and, as is as such "more atheistic than that of Nietzsche."⁴⁰⁵ On Heidegger's view man has his own light within himself. Man's deepest wisdom is to realize the meaninglessness of his existence and of the meaninglessness of his attribution of meaning to his existence.⁴⁰⁶

Thinking of history in terms of his view of man Heidegger works in the line of Dilthey and Kierkegaard.⁴⁰⁷ Going beyond them he ends with a mere anti-intellectual attitude of pure negation. This is his religion. It is this religion that supports his

⁴⁰³ Zuidema, "De Dood Bij Heidegger," p. 53.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

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philosophy. But in his philosophy western man consumes himself.⁴⁰⁸

It should be noted here that Zuidema's discussion of Heidegger is basically concerned with *Sein und Zeit*, not with the "later Heidegger." We have dealt with the "later Heidegger" earlier in this work. The main point of the "later Heidegger" is that being is history (*Sein* is *Geschichte* and that *Geschichte* is lit up to itself; it is *Lichtungsgeschichte*.⁴⁰⁹ Man's authentic being consists in his participation in this *Lichtungsgeschichte*. This was, in effect, also the message of *Sein und Zeit*.

C. Karl Barth-Existential Theology

We turn now to an article written in the 18th volume of *Philosophia Reformata* on "Theology and Philosophy in the Church Dogmatics of Karl Barth," and to note briefly another article, written in the same magazine (20th volume, 1955) on "The Revelation Concepts of Karl Barth and Martin Heidegger." The controlling principle on which Barth wrote his *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, says Zuidema, was that of the freedom of God. In order to safeguard this principle Barth enters upon a discussion of philosophy. If Barth is going to protect his theology of the freedom of God he needs the support of an atheistic philosophy. The sort of philosophy Barth needs proceeds from the renaissance doctrine of the supposedly free or autonomous man. Only such a God does not interfere with the idea of God as

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁴⁰⁹ See Cornelius Van Til, *The Later Heidegger and Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1964), pp. 7 ff.

wholly free and therefore wholly hidden. The atheistic character of such a philosophy is no hindrance to Barth's theology; atheism can be relativized by the idea of the hidden revelation of God.⁴¹⁰

To be sure, Barth negates atheistic philosophy. But he does so in terms of his idea of revelation. In his revelation, God is wholly revealed and wholly unrevealed. It is in terms of this notion of God as identical with his revelation as wholly revealed and wholly hidden that Barth negates the atheistic philosophy of such men as Jaspers, Heidegger and Sartre.

In his early work on Karl Barth, G. C. Berkouwer says that Barth is more nominalistic than was Occam. In similar fashion Zuidema points out that Barth's No outreaches that of the existentialist philosophers.

Such being the case Barth is able to attain to a wider affirmation than is made by the existentialist philosophers. Barth takes man up into participation with the self-existence and self-revelation of God. This participation in God is grace; this grace is free and universal. When the existentialist Heidegger speaks of reality as lit up, Barth goes beyond him and speaks of the universal yes of God to all men.⁴¹¹

Existenz philosophy seeks for an idea of transcendence but Barth's idea of transcendence

⁴¹⁰ S. U. Zuidema, "Theologie en Wijsbegeerte In De Kirchliche Dogmatik van Karl Barth," *Philosophia Reformata* 18 (1953), p. 83.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

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outreaches that of Existenz philosophy. A true transcendence idea, according to Barth, realizes that man's theological being is in advance "in the Word of God." "Our theological existence in the Word of God' is divinity, nothing less, nothing else. And the authentic being of man is identical with his theological existence."⁴¹²

The necessary correlative of this idea of man's participation in divinity is the idea that created existence is, as such, atheistic. Philosophy, itself atheistic, deals with this atheistic reality. Barth's Christological founding of anthropology is accomplished by means of the idea of the univocity of Being as correlative to the idea that man, and his world are dumb. It appears then that the conceptual apparatus of Barth's *Kirchliche Dogmatik* is borrowed from modern irrationalism and in particular from existentialism.⁴¹³

In existentialist philosophy man is history; in Barth's theology God is history (*Geschichte* not *Historie*). Thus the categories of "humanistic existential philosophy" have become the categories of Barth's theology of revelation. Without the categories of existentialist philosophy, the whole of Barth's theology would fall to pieces like a house of cards.⁴¹⁴ Barth's theology is, therefore, as strong or as weak as existentialist philosophy. If Barth is going to make his theological X known to us, he must do so in terms of philosophy.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

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In his second article Zuidema makes a detailed comparison between the revelation concept of Barth and the revelation concept of Heidegger's philosophy. Both men hold that the Bible as such is not the Word of God. If this were so it would smash both Barth's and Heidegger's ideas of revelation. So it cannot be. In both concepts the idea of revelation has such force that the Bible cannot be the Word of God. Essentially the Bible rests within the sphere of the dominion of man, of his little existence, and of his degenerated reason; it is at his disposal.⁴¹⁵

It appears then that in both of his articles Zuidema finds that in Barth an essential nominalism is correlative to an essential realism. In Barth's earlier writings nominalism was dominant over realism but in his later writings realism was dominant over nominalism. In both respects his views resemble those of Heidegger.

Zuidema deals in a separate article with Barth's view of theology as history.

Karl Barth has throughout his works rejected the idea of analogy of being.⁴¹⁶ He did this in the interest of making God's revelation in Christ the one, all-embrasive answer to all questions that may properly be asked in theology. "God's '*lebendiges Handeln*' is the axis on which the entire theory of reality and of knowledge turns."⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁵ S. U. Zuidema, "De Openbaringsideeën Van Karl Barth en Martin Heidegger," *Philosophia Reformata* 20 (1955), p. 75.

⁴¹⁶ S. U. Zuidema, *Konfrontatie met Karl Barth* (Amsterdam: Buijten en Schippenheijn, 1963), p. 106.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

Barth, therefore, replaces the idea of the analogy of being with the idea of the analogy of faith. “God can be known by God only.”⁴¹⁸ And only God can know this fact.

How can man then ever have any intimation of this fact? Only if God grants it to him by grace. Unfortunately God cannot give man any knowledge of his exclusive self-knowledge except by objectifying himself and his knowledge. God must make himself a “*Gegenstand*” of human knowledge. He must put himself at man’s disposal.

But has not Barth always rejected every notion of “objective” knowledge of God?⁴¹⁹

Barth’s idea of analogy of faith bears within it the same fatal weakness that is found in the analogy of being. Barth’s idea of the analogy of faith is in fact based on the idea of a “*analogia fientis* (analogy of eventuation), i.e., of a *analogia historiae*, which underlies the whole of Barth’s thinking ...”⁴²⁰

“According to Barth the essence and the will of God are ‘*geschichtlich*’... Eternity is God’s time, God’s form of existence.”⁴²¹

It is in terms of this historical character of God that Barth rejects the idea of substance that underlay the *analogia entis* doctrine.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

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God is “ ‘*freies Ereignis*’, ‘*das Sein in der Tat*’, ‘*Entscheidung*’, ‘*faktische Selbstbestätigung*’, ‘*Subjectivität*’, ‘*Aktualität*’, ‘*Liebendigkeit*’, ‘*Sichselbst Setzende* Person’—whose unchangeability (or, as Barth prefers to say, whose faithfulness) consists in the fact that he is “the eternally new.”

Only the blind can fail to see, says Zuidema, that Barth uses by and large, the same categories that existential philosophy employs. According to existential philosophy man does not merely live in history. Man is history.⁴²² In Existentialist philosophy man is self-positing; in Barth’s theology God is self-positing.

All the predicates that Barth ascribes to God the existentialists philosophers ascribe to man. Existentialist philosophers think of the essence of man as historicity in free act of communication. As in existential philosophy existence precedes essence, so in Barth’s revelation theology God’s existence precedes essence. “As in existential philosophy man elects himself, when he elects man.”⁴²³

It might appear then that at least Barth’s revelation theology differs radically from the theology of scholasticism. When Barth says that in God “*esse sequitur operari*” is not this the opposite of the Thomistic idea that in God “*Operari sequitur esse*”?

⁴²² *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

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Not at all, says Zuidema. Barth's idea of the analogy of faith ends up in being an *analogia historiae*. "The being of God is history. But this implies that Barth has a doctrine of the 'being' of God; he considers himself capable of saying that God is '*Gottesgeschichte*.' The whole of Barth's theology is suspended from this all-controlling idea.⁴²⁴ It is thus that Barth places his 'theohistoriology' over against the 'theo-ontology' involved in the doctrine of *analogia entis*."⁴²⁵ Barth has defined the essence of God as thoroughly as the scholastics did. As a mortal man he seeks to penetrate the inmost being of God.⁴²⁶ The pride of the creature, his desire to be as God is found in Barth's theology as much as it is in that of Aquinas. The synthesis of existential philosophy and Christianity and the synthesis of Greek philosophy with Christianity alike elevate man to the place of God. And "he who makes God superfluous, makes himself impossible."⁴²⁷

D. The Structure of Barth's Doctrine of Creation

The hermeneutical significance of Barth's theology appears with special clarity in his doctrine of creation. Zuidema discusses what Barth says on this subject in his article on "The Structure of Barth's Doctrine of Creation." Barth's notion of the *Geschichtlichkeit Gottes* underlies his view of

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

⁴²⁷ S. U. Zuidema, "Man in Philosophy," *Free University Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 2, (March 1958), p. 96.

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creation. “A speculative historical doctrine of God, closely related to his view of the trinity forms the background of Barth’s creation and redemptive history.” “As created time is our form of existence, thus eternity as absolute time is God’s form of existence.” God, no more than man exists beyond the “*Geschichtlichkeit*” and the time-form of existence. “For this reason we spoke of the panhistorism of Karl Barth. This panhistorism sets him over against classical Thomism, which found its support in an ontology of God as well as of the non-divine and accordingly, speaks of an *analogia entis* rather than of an *analogia historiae*.”⁴²⁸

It is this “historising of God, of man and the world that has not failed to make its imprint on his doctrine of creation.”⁴²⁹ The history of creation “rests in the covenant of grace and in the history of reconciliation, in the pre-existent Christ, who is reconciliation.”⁴³⁰ The triumph of grace is prefigured even described in Gen: 1:2, where it says: ‘the earth was *tohoewahoboe*.’ (Gn 1:2)

It is his already accepted scheme of existential thinking that furnishes Barth with his allegorical interpretation of the Genesis account. The *Geschichte* is the process of God’s reconciling mankind; such is the covenant of God with Israel, with mankind; accordingly creation is said to be good. The covenant of grace, “in which God takes pity on poor sinners, is the ‘*innere Grund*’ of creation

⁴²⁸ S. U. Zuidema, “Structuur van de Scheppingsleer van Karl Barth,” *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift* 62 (1962) p. 21.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

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and for that reason of the ‘*valde bonum*’ of Gen: 1:31.⁴³¹ “This theologically speculative doctrine of Nothingness and of Reconciliation plays the first fiddle in Barth’s exegesis of Gen: 1 and 2.”⁴³² God’s covenant of grace is the meaning of the world. It is as a foil to this covenant of grace that Nothingness as defeated opposition to Christ’s triumphant grace has its place. It is this that the text of Genesis must teach. It is that the text of Genesis, as part of the text of Scripture as a whole must teach. The Scripture must teach this because the categories of an existential philosophy, based on the Kantian freedom-nature scheme require it. And, as already noted, this freedom-nature scheme is based on the idea of the self-authenticating man. And herewith we end as we began with the basic concept of existential philosophy

E. From Bultmann to Fuchs

We turn now to Zuidema’s analysis of the hermeneutical methodology of Rudolph Bultmann and of Ernst Fuchs as Zuidema traces this in his work *From Bultmann to Fuchs*.

Basic to an understanding of both Bultmann and Fuchs is their dependence on Heidegger and his concept of understanding (*Verstehen*). The very term “existential interpretation” as employed by Bultmann and Fuchs derives from Heidegger. Nor is this all. The “vision and method” of this existential interpretation is but an extension of what Heidegger taught in his pioneering work on *Sein und Zeit*.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

“Without taking note of Heidegger’s teaching with respect to ‘*Verstehen*’ one cannot understand either Bultmann or Fuchs.” Bultmann and Fuchs do, of course, differ from Heidegger. Bultmann magnifies this difference when he says that his own theological interpretation deals with authentic man while Heidegger’s philosophical interpretation deals only with inauthentic man. Even so the basic pattern between the two is the same.⁴³³

For an understanding of Bultmann we must, accordingly go back to Heidegger’s view of man as first set forth in *Sein und Zeit*. Man must be understood in terms of his interrelationships between the free world of *Geschichte* and the determined world of *Historie*.

Man is man primarily as *geschichtlich*, and therefore as free and contingent. In this world he has freedom unto death (*Freiheit Zum Tode*).⁴³⁴ Having this or, rather, being this freedom he is not bound by the calendar distinctions between past, present, and future. His past is never a limitation upon him; he meets himself as his future comes to him.

“Being is without principle, without structure; it is coarse and raw facticity, meaninglessness, bare factuality which has neither smell nor taste.”⁴³⁵

Both Bultmann and Fuchs have taken over this notion of freedom unto death from Heidegger. Both

⁴³³ S. U. Zuidema, *van Bultman naar Fuchs* (Franeker: T. Wever, n.d.), p. 6.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

men have also taken over Heidegger's idea of "*Verfallenheit*." Man is fallen in that he seeks to develop his true self in the surface-phenomenal realm of *Historie*. Instead of realizing his own self by constantly transcending it man seeks authenticity in the treadmill everydayness of life. In doing so he "betrays his own freedom, his own distance, his own relation to his own future self." "He betrays his own *Geschichtlichkeit* ..." ⁴³⁶ He then "understands himself as something objective, as a thing, as something that is '*verfügbar*,' as an objective and objectifiable reality." ⁴³⁷

Bultmann and Fuchs are in basic agreement with this notion of man as "man-in-the-world," as delineated by Heidegger. That is to say they agree with this eschatological mode of reasoning. Remember, says Zuidema, that this eschatological mode of thinking is not a question of days and years. "Not in history, which a man has (as natural and historical existence), but in the history which he is, is the true *Geschichtlichkeit* of man." ⁴³⁸

Up to this point Bultmann and Fuchs agree with Heidegger. That is to say, they agree with Heidegger on the idea of pure contingency as the true Origin of man. But now they introduce a theological and more particularly a Christological element into Heidegger's notion of Origin. Or, we may say, they reinterpret the entire notion of Origin christologically. "The origin of man's being-in-the-world is the future of the kingdom of God, the future of the kingdom of

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*

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God, the future of God's power of love, the future of Jesus Christ. And the advent at this future, which creates the 'moment', is the advent of this power of the love of God in the present."⁴³⁹ It is the "*Christus praesens*" which now becomes the principle in terms of which man's true future meets him. Heidegger's eschatology is herewith Christologized. And Kant's ethical dualism, his sharp antithesis between the world of science; and the world of conceptualized and conceptualizable entities; and the world of freedom and contingency, the world of person to person confrontation, here finds its more recent expression.⁴⁴⁰

This Christologized eschatology of Bultmann and Fuchs is, like the eschatology of Heidegger based on the notion of the absolute questionableness of reality as a whole and of man in particular. But this absolute questionableness of man is now seen as correlative to Christ instead of to man himself as realizing himself. Man's seeking himself becomes his seeking for God. If philosophy seeks the redemptive answer that he needs in his own eschatology, theology seeks it in the eschatology of God. The unauthentic man becomes the sinner of Scripture. The sinner seeks for his certainties in the objectifiable realm, the realm of nature and history. He refuses God's call, till by faith and from faith he yields himself to God as he hears of the "*kerygma* of the advent of God in the presence of Christ."⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

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But how, we may ask, can the world of *Geschichte* make its presence felt in the realm of *Historie*? This presence must be all-determinative. It is man's nature to be what he is eschatologically in Christ. But how then can the Christ of *Geschichte* be identical with the Jesus of *Historie*? Fuchs himself asks this question. Without hesitation he makes the antithesis between *Geschichte* and *Historie* absolute. How else could he have an absolute Christ? But how can he have his absolute Christ except as a projection into the "wholly other" from the realm of *Historie* which is wholly non-existent? How can there be a take-off into *Geschichte* from *Historie*? How can that which takes off from Historic itself be anything other than Historic? Will such Historic not be dissolved if and when it enters *Geschichte*? *Selbstverstandniss* involves an element of *Historie*; the self, however free, can speak to itself, and to other selves only by means of concepts that spring from converse with the objectifiable world.

To be a true, authentic self, this self must be completely absorbed into *Geschichte*. The self cannot understand itself as both *historisch* and *geschichtlich* unless, in its true nature it is wholly above the distinction between these two. But to be wholly above these two it must be wholly anonymous, wholly unknown and unknowable, wholly non-existent and wholly non-existable.

But suppose we grant Fuchs the permission to begin with the *Geschichtlichkeit* of Christ, how can this Christ land, or re-land in *Historie* without at once being wholly hidden, wholly objectified in *Historie*.

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Zuidema does not ask all of these questions but he does indicate the basic difficulties a man like Fuchs faces. “Fuchs does not hesitate to say that revelation sublates history.”⁴⁴² What else could he do in terms of his “neo-metaphysical system?” An historical Jesus cannot reveal. “For this reason the historical resurrection of Jesus becomes the greatest scandal for faith, and faith in this ‘salvation-fact’ becomes identical with unbelief in the approach of the future of Christ in the ‘present.’ ”

As an “objective” happening the suffering of Christ on the cross means nothing distinctive. “But the *kerygma* of this suffering gives meaning to it. This (*kerygma*) attributes to it (the crucifixion) the meaning of a resurrection *kerygma*: our existential resurrection of the burden of our sinful selves into the freedom of the future of the power of God’s love, which is the origin of our end (*eindsel*).”⁴⁴³

Having explained the general process of Christologizing by which Bultmann and Fuchs go “beyond” Heidegger, Zuidema stops to point out the fact that this process involves the idea of demythologization. Faith must be open for that is correlative to the notion of pure Origin. But if faith had any content derived from the world of objectivity, its correlative relation to pure Origin would cease. In loyalty to Kant’s distinction between *Verstand* and *Vernunft* Bultmann and Fuchs as well as Heidegger dismiss all objective content of faith.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

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Yet they are not, and cannot, consistently do this. If they were consistent then the whole world of scientific reality would be absorbed into pure contingency. Therewith the very idea of *kerygma* would also cease.

What they need to do is to dispose of orthodox content and retain unorthodox content. The orthodox teaching with respect to God's miraculous redemptive work in history must be excluded.⁴⁴⁴ The idea of an absolutely contingent Origin as End, must be substituted for the Christ of ordinary history. All this is in accord with the nature-freedom scheme of post-Kantian thought.⁴⁴⁵ And all this involves the problematics of a self that consists of a dialectical pendulum swing between pure rationalistic determinism and pure irrationalistic indeterminism.

But we go on to inquire in what way Fuchs seeks to go beyond Bultmann. The answer is that Fuchs attaches himself more definitely to Heidegger's later writings than does Bultmann. In what then do the later writings of Heidegger differ from *Sein und Zeit*? The central point is that in his later writing more than in his earlier Heidegger makes the *Sprachlichkeit* of being his primary category. Being is revelational and purposive.⁴⁴⁶

But in Heidegger's philosophy this revelational nature of being is not dependent on God. On the contrary it includes God. So Fuchs gives a

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁴⁴⁶ *Cf. earlier discussion of the later Heidegger in this work.*

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“Christological-theological” turn to Heidegger’s thought. According to Fuchs, being in its revelational character is God.

But this revelation is eventual in character. Accordingly it is correlative to man’s receiving it. There is no faith unless there be revelation and there is no revelation if there is no faith. “Revelation is revelation only in relation to faith and faith is faith only in relation to revelation.”⁴⁴⁷

In this fact of the complete correlativity of revelation and faith Fuchs finds the means of going beyond Bultmann. But then he derives his vision of this fact from Heidegger. Fuchs has Christologized the later Heidegger as earlier, following Bultmann, he had Christologized the earlier Heidegger. The “hermeneutical circle,” i.e., the interdependence of revelation and faith—already operative in the first act of christologizing, becomes more obvious in the second. Faith is now more obviously contentless and therefore revelation must also be more obviously contentless. The demythologizing process must be more thorough than ever. To be a true meeting with God in the presence of Christ “is not a myth, is nothing objective, nothing presentable, nothing that can be objectified.”⁴⁴⁸ “In the last analysis it is only the *fides qua creditur* that is correlative with the presence of Christ, while the *fides quae creditur* as historical, as objective, etc.,

⁴⁴⁷ Zuidema, *van Bultman naar Fuchs*, p. 41.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

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constitutes a permanent threat for revelation and faith.”⁴⁴⁹

But can faith thus renounce all “objective” content and be faith in any sense at all? Fuchs himself is, says Zuidema, the best evidence of the fact that he has no such contentless faith. He merely substitutes a new content, for that of historic Christianity. He retains “the historical Jesus at Nazareth.” Then with gigantic hermeneutical force he makes John 1:1 say that the *Fraglichkeit* of man is merely a function of the *Sprachlichkeit* of the ‘jenseitige’ eschatological God in Christ.” Is there no dogma, no content here? There obviously is. It is a dogma supposedly involved in *Selbstverständniss*. Otherwise there would be a *sacrificium intellectus*. But now Fuchs substitutes pure contingency for traditional miracle. He builds this basic contingency, enveloping God and man into *Selbstverstanis* itself. All men of intelligence can understand that an intelligent faith is and must be *selbstverständlich*. Man’s experience must presuppose Christ as its answer. But Christ as the answer must be more deeply *fragwürdig* than other men.

It is thus, argues Zuidema, that by going beyond Bultmann by means of the later Heidegger, Fuchs has to project a Christ-ideal that is both completely known and completely unknown by man, and this Christ-ideal must be wholly identical with Jesus of Nazareth. And all men must have an experience of

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 49.

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participation in this Jesus of Nazareth as the principle of grace for them.⁴⁵⁰

Returning to what Bultmann and Fuchs have in common, Zuidema asserts that their theology is merely a theological anthropology which roots in *Selbstverständnis* as a human possibility. Bultmann and Fuchs have not rejected Schleiermacher and Herrmann.⁴⁵¹

But what about Barth? Did he not reject the immanentism of the consciousness theologians of the nineteenth century? Does he not insist that revelation creates its own pre-conditions and therefore is not correlative to man's *Selbstverständnis*? Does not Barth's principle that only God can understand God imply that our understanding of God amounts to our being understood by God?

Of course Bultmann and Fuchs do not, says Zuidema, deny that existential experience springs from revelation, but in their case "existential experience" prevails over revelation. In this respect they differ with Barth who makes revelation prevail over existential experience.

We ask finally about the place of hermeneutics in relation to self-understanding in the thinking of Bultmann and Fuchs. The answer is that their general existentialist point of view leads them to attribute to hermeneutics the task of determining the structure, the limits and the nature of human

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

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existence.⁴⁵² Exegesis must follow existential hermeneutics. An absolutely free and autonomous hermeneutics determines that “there can be no revelation of God in nature and in history. The crucifixion of Christ can be nothing more or less than an eschatological fact, in which all that is objective fact is sublated in order that it may point to the Christ-presence of *Geschichte*.”⁴⁵³

4. Zuidema on the New Hermeneutic

A. Fuchs-Ebeling

So far we have concerned ourselves with Zuidema’s analysis of modern humanistic and existentialist philosophy. This must serve as a background for what Zuidema says on recent hermeneutical studies. Zuidema’s writings on recent hermeneutic fall into two parts. There is the first part that considers Existential-theological Hermeneutic. This part deals with “modern” thinkers, such as Fuchs, Ebeling and Lothar Steiger. There is, secondly, the part that considers *An Ambiguous Theological Hermeneutic*. This part deals specifically with Kuitert.

We consider now Zuidema’s first article. Zuidema turns his researches in humanistic-existential thinking to good account as he analyzes recent existential-theological hermeneutic.

Modern theological hermeneutic is based on the “discovery” of the “historicity of man.” But we shall

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 69–70.

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misunderstand the significance of this “discovery” unless we learn to employ the difference between *Historizitat* and *Geschichtlichkeit*. Man is involved in both. He is unauthentic so far as he is involved in the former; he is authentic so far as he is involved in the latter.⁴⁵⁴ Moreover, it is all-important to see that man’s *Geschichtlichkeit* has its foundation in the *Geschichtlichkeit* of God. Man’s *Geschichtlichkeit* is lifted to a new and higher plateau when the *Geschichtlichkeit* of God is made the basic category of interpretation. Out of the theological discovery of the *Geschichtlichkeit* of God a new *Geschichtlichkeit* of man is discovered.

Not even modern existential philosophy can appreciate this fact. Even when it seeks to deal with God, any philosophy has no more than a concept of God.

Of course, existential philosophy has done one useful thing. It has set itself against all metaphysical philosophy and theological views of man. Existential theology needs this service given by existential philosophy. Existential hermeneutic must go wholly beyond philosophical hermeneutic while yet by means of philosophical hermeneutics it finds it can speak to modern man. That is to say theological hermeneutics builds up a theology that is free from all metaphysics and, at the same time, builds up an apologetic with which it can approach the unbeliever. Thus a great apologetic as well as a great theological advance is accomplished by means of

⁴⁵⁴ S. U. Zuidema, “*Existentie-Theologische Hermeneutik*,” *Philosophia Reformata* 32 (1967), p. 1.

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the great discovery of the joint *Geschichtlichkeit* of God and of man.⁴⁵⁵

Of special interest is the new concept of Scriptural authority implied in the *Geschichtlichkeit* of God and of man. Karl Barth's denial of the direct identification of revelation and Scripture on the one hand and his affirmation of their indirect identification on the other hand exhibits this fact. Barth takes all the liberty he pleases with the text of Scripture insofar as it is like all literature, *historisch*. But for Barth the Bible is the Word of God in so far as it is *Geschichtlich*.⁴⁵⁶ Bultmann's view of Scripture is similar to that of Barth.⁴⁵⁷

Thinking along the lines of Barth and Bultmann, Gerhard Ebeling holds that "in actual preaching God liberates himself from the fixed, presentable, objectified text of the past ..." In preaching this past is made present to man.⁴⁵⁸ Yet he assumes that the text of Scripture must always be present. E. Fuchs and H. Ott are of the same opinion. Without the Holy Scripture there is no revelation by God or about God, ...⁴⁵⁹ Without this residue of "fundamentalism," these men, realize all contact between God and man is lost. The *Geschichtlichkeit* of God must, somehow be connected with the ordinary historicity of Jesus of Nazareth and therefore with the ordinary historical narrative about him.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-3.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

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Thus the view of Scripture as the Word of God is accommodated to the idea of man as *Geschichte*, which has a history, and who as such constantly anew transcends and must transcend his own history and historicity. If the Word of God is going to touch man in his hidden *Geschichtlichkeit*, then it must be more than an historical phenomenon. Accordingly the Word of God can never function as Holy Scripture, as an historical document. It must never submit to becoming an object of natural or historical science. "It must lie beyond the reach of all scientific methodology. Otherwise it would fall wholly within the horizon of nature and history. It must be correlative with the *Geschichtlichkeit* of man who as such, stands above and goes beyond all historicity."⁴⁶⁰

As a written document Scripture is merely historical and: "A written document can be no revelation. It does not even have the power to reveal man to himself. How much the less can God in his self-revelation, in his revelation to man, in his revelation to himself. Nature and history cannot, as Fuchs, one of the prominent among the younger contends, reveal God." Scripture can, at most, be a bark (bolster) a shell or a packing medium, with which revelation can have no inner connection.⁴⁶¹ "Man's existential *Selbstverständnis* must be the scopus, the '*Woraufhin*' of all divine revelation."⁴⁶²

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

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As to the view of Scripture and its dialectical relation to Word revelation Ebeling and Fuchs follow the lead of Bultmann. The same is true with respect to the relation of Jesus of Nazareth to the Word of God.⁴⁶³

In the second section of his article Zuidema deals with what he calls “The Eschatological Theologism of Lothar Steiger.” In this section Zuidema analyzes the argument found in Steiger’s book *Die Hermeneutik als Dogmatisches Problem*. We make only a brief reference to the analysis.

Steiger, as well as Bultmann, assumes the *Geschichtlichkeit* of God and of man. The proclamation of the *Geschichtlichkeit* of God requires the idea of nature and history as meaningless onticities (*Zinloze onticiteiten*). “A neognostic nihilology of ‘being’ is the negative presupposition of Steiger’s doctrine of the *dogmatische Sache*’, a nihilology which he shares with Heidegger’s existential philosophy and with Bultmann’s existential theology.”⁴⁶⁴

It is thus that the idea of pure contingency is made basic to the God-man relation. For if this “groundless ground of natural and historic onticity were removed, then the groundless ground on which both man and God depend for their transcendence and meaning falls away.”⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

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Of course, God's coming to man in Christ is the primary feature of the dialectic between God and man. Existentialism must constantly and ever anew be "taken up into participation in Christ's redemptive history, in which teleologically is on the way to his glorification."⁴⁶⁶

Zuidema finds the same antinomy in Steiger's position that he finds in Bultmann. Steiger as well as Bultmann fails to make intelligible to us the place of Jesus of Nazareth in his hermeneutic. On the one hand there is no need for him at all. Is he not embedded in the realm of nature and history. Is not this realm, the realm of the meaningless? On the other hand every man lives in this realm of the meaningless. If he is to be lifted out of it then it must be through Jesus who is, with them, in it. It is through participation in the *Heilsgeschehen* of God as identical with Jesus that man must come to true *Selbstverständnis* and with it, to true self-transcendence. Yet, as Heidegger's philosophy, requires, man must already have *Selbstverständnis* prior to his meeting of Christ. How else can he be aware of the inauthenticity of his ordinary historical self?

Seeking to go beyond Bultmann Steiger can only manifest all the more clearly the glaring antinomy in the effort to connect the world of pure freedom, of pure *Geschichte*, with its simple assertion of the arbitrary sovereignty of God and the world of pure *Historie*, with its arbitrary assertion of the sovereignty of man. How can the idea of the

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

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primacy of God's sovereignty over man's sovereignty of man be made plain to us if the two realms stand in absolute antithesis over against one another? The desperation in which Steiger, with Bultmann and others, finds himself, is evident most obviously in the simple assertion that the man Jesus is God and that God is the man Jesus. Thus only a vague, abstract idea of teleology, supposedly exemplified in Jesus, remains, and this vague idea of teleology is composed of the mutually exclusive principles of pure identity, and pure contingency. How could it be otherwise if you forsake the biblical teaching with respect to God and his relation to man in Christ?⁴⁶⁷

B. Kuitert

Zuidema devotes a separate article of over forty pages to the hermeneutics of Kuitert. The title of the article is "An Ambiguous Theological Hermeneutic." He deals primarily with the hermeneutical position expressed and implied in Kuitert's book *The Reality of Faith*. Zuidema divides his article into five sections as follows: 1. What is Metaphysic? 2. What is Theology? 3. What is Existential Theology? 4. What is the Relation Between Theology and History? 5. What is the Relation between 'die Sache' and the text, and between the Canon of Holy Scripture and the History of Tradition? 6. What is the Controlling Motif of the Author? It would be very useful to follow Zuidema's argument in detail. As it is we can touch on such points as concern the main contention of

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

our work. Even so, we shall, in a general way follow Zuidema point by point.

(1) What is Metaphysic?

Kuitert wants to present the Christian faith in which he was reared to its cultured despisers. His purpose is, therefore, apologetical. He wants to help the Christian believer to find his way through the labyrinth of modern thought, more especially through the labyrinth of recent existential thought.

If Christian believers are to have contact with modern men, they must join them in their effort to discover the presuppositions which make human experience intelligible.

Together with such men as Lothar Steiger they must, as orthodox Christians, reject all forms of metaphysics.⁴⁶⁸ “As is the case with the existential-theologians he (Kuitert) struggles with the ‘great discovery’ of the historicity of man, of dogmatics, of human culture and of—God.”⁴⁶⁹ Under these circumstances it is difficult for Kuitert to speak or the “antithesis.” Yet how otherwise can he speak of the Christian faith at all? Kuitert partakes of the antinomy involved in the position of modern existential theologians and in the ambiguity of seeking to save his own position over against the existential theologians.

⁴⁶⁸ S. U. Zuidema, “Eentweeslachtige theologische hermeneutiek” *Philosophia Reformata* 33 (1968), p. 45.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

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With their notion of the *Geschichtlichkeit Gottes* the existential theologians destroy the significance of history altogether. To escape this nemesis they speak of *Historie*, of the historical Jesus. But when they do this then the *Geschichtlichkeit Gottes* is lost altogether. So they must have Jesus Christ and all men with him consist of a point of intersection, between pure timelessness and pure chance. Jesus Christ and all men with him are composed of a contentless point of interaction between pure freedom and pure necessity. And, because of his enamoration of the new metaphysic Kuitert rejects the old metaphysic. Having committed himself to the dogmatically assumed freedom-nature metaphysic of existentialism he can only stammer when he, nevertheless, wants to speak of the death and resurrection of Christ as the Christian faith speaks. He cuts a deep groove between the “packing-material in which the Bible is given us, and the *Sache*, the message of redemption, the witness of Scripture.”⁴⁷⁰ Together with the existential theologians Kuitert repeatedly opposes every idea of truth which speaks of holding certain assertions for true. In their train, Kuitert teaches that every form of holding assertions to be true evinces attachment to human inauthenticity. Accordingly Kuitert involves himself in the “self-contradiction” of the existential theologians, when they insist that to have truth at all, men must hold as truth their statement that to hold any statement as truth, is to speak as no man who knows himself as truly free, should speak. If Kuitert thinks that he can get a hearing for the gospel by thus identifying himself with modern irrationalist

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⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

thinking he is mistaken. Apply the existentialist categories to the teaching of Scripture and the message of redemption is destroyed.⁴⁷¹

The kernel of the modern philosophy of the historicity of man, is the notion of absolute human autonomy. Man is the former of history in a universe of pure contingency. All reality is therefore radically questionable. The absolute and the historical exclude one another. This is the heart of thinking in antimetaphysical fashion. “Dr. Kuitert has accepted this neo-metaphysical view of truth implicitly without having seen its philosophical foundation.” The philosophy of the cosmomic idea (Dooyeweerd) had already exposed the purely immanentist character of this modern irrationalist freedom-nature scheme of thought. Yet Kuitert swallows it without a gurgle. Why does not Kuitert see that the new metaphysic and the old metaphysic are alike based on the foundation of the autonomy of the philosophical reason? This notion underlies both sorts of metaphysics. It is the *proton pseudos* of all apostate philosophy. Yet Kuitert joins the modern theologians who build on this false startingpoint in the interest of bringing the gospel to men.⁴⁷²

More specifically Kuitert’s specifically theological hermeneutic is still based on this *proton pseudos*.⁴⁷³ As an orthodox Christian Kuitert is anxious to preserve the uniqueness of the resurrection of Christ. He wants to save the

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

resurrection of Christ as a fact of genuine saving significance for men.⁴⁷⁴ But then Kuitert at once envelops the resurrection in his new metaphysical doctrine of God. “God’s being is his act of saving. It is the being of the acting and speaking God. God’s being is his continuity in the history of salvation.” It is by means of this “theological-metaphysical doctrine of being “that Kuitert seeks to escape the purely contingent nature of all reality.”⁴⁷⁵

A doctrine of pure abstract identity is thus made correlative to pure abstract diversity. When the two meet—and they always meet—they cancel each other out. How does Kuitert expect to save the death and resurrection of Christ as actually redemptive by thus destroying them?⁴⁷⁶

Kuitert first slavishly follows modern humanistic philosophical thought and then modern humanistic theological thought in the interest of having a point of contact with modern man. Then he tries to give a biblical twist to this modern thought. The result is that he no longer sees anything like the true nature of the antithesis between the Christianity of Scripture and its modern falsifications. Kuitert has to twist himself in all manner of contortions in order to combine his own faith in the genuine redemptive work of Christ, based on his physical resurrection with his acceptance of the modern historical-critical method.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 59–60.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

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Kuitert's idea of tradition as the starting point for man's knowledge and appreciation of the death and resurrection of Christ is involved in the same difficulty as the idea of the resurrection itself. Kuitert wants to save the genuinely historical nature of the original witnesses to the resurrection, even as with it he wants to save the genuine historical nature of the resurrection itself. But the two are involved in one another. Kuitert must have his point of contact with modern man by means of the *Geschichtlichkeit Gottes* and the historicity of man. Accordingly the faith in the resurrection must itself be participant in the resurrection. Faith and its object are ideally identical. God is his revelation and man "knows" of this revelation only as he participates in this being of God as revelation. The first witnesses to the resurrection of Christ had to witness to the Event of *Geschichte* in terms of the words borrowed from *Historie*. So does every subsequent witness. When he speaks of the resurrection of Christ, so far as it is *Historie*, the historian deals only with the "abstraction of a meaningless, i.e. polyinterpretable event." The *Gestalt* of an historical event has, apparently, no inner relation with its *Gehalt*. Why then is there any point to historical investigation at all? So the historian must become the "believer" if he is to know the inwardness of a fact of history. But how can the historian become a believer if, while still a historian, he can have no awareness at all of the inwardness?⁴⁷⁸

Summing up the matter, we find that Kuitert is willing to cast the whole of the gospel of the death

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

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and resurrection of Christ into the utter questionableness, into the utter contingency and irrationalism of modern existential thought in order to meet the modern man on his own ground. Apparently Kuitert is unaware of the fact that this idea of the utter questionableness of modern thought implies its correlative, i.e., an abstract, eternally self-subsistent principle of abstract being.⁴⁷⁹ Kuitert seeks for a dialogue with the cultured despisers of the Christian religion by means of a synthesis of Christianity and modern existential thinking. In the dialogue between the modern humanist and the Christian it is not the former but the latter who is likely to be defeated. When “in the interest of making his position intelligible to the modern man, the Christian theologian is willing to adopt the humanist philosophical-hermeneutical circle of the profane sphere of thought” this theologian is likely to be the loser.⁴⁸⁰ Kuitert can offer us no real contact for a dialogue with ultra-modern man. He has made a genuine transcendental criticism of both philosophical and theological thought impossible.⁴⁸¹

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⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

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Chapter 4:

The New Hermeneutic of Holland¹

6

Our concern in this work has been to understand the hermeneutic of modern theologians, especially of modern German theologians. The background of these theologians is the older modernism of such men as Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Hermann and Harnack and the new modernism, call it neo-orthodoxy if you win, of such men as Barth and Bultmann.

We now take a final look at the hermeneutic of some Reformed theologians of the Netherlands. The background of these theologians is the theology of Calvin, of Kuyper, of Bavinck and the Reformed Confessions, such as the Heidelberg Catechism, the Netherlands Confession and the Five Articles of Dordt.

One would have thought that the Reformed theologians of Holland would have pleaded with their colleagues in Germany to forsake the path that leads to darkness, futility and despair. Was it not

¹ *The writer is publishing a separate work on this subject.*

⁶Van Til, C. (1974). *The New Hermeneutic*. The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company: Phillipsburg, NJ.

dear to them that the hermeneutic of such men as Fuchs and Ebeling led into a blind alley? Was it not clear to the men of Holland that the new hermeneutic of Germany was based on the idea of human autonomy and the idea of the correlativity of the principle of pure contingency and the principle pure determinism, as these are derived from Kant and his followers? Was it not clear to the men of Holland that if one accepts the new hermeneutic of Germany one must with it reject the self-attesting Christ of Scripture, of whom and unto whom are all things? Was it not clear to the men of Holland that the new hermeneutic of Germany requires, and is built upon a philosophy of history, which Augustine spoke of as the City of Man? Did not the men of Holland see that the men of Germany were seeking to “make sense” of the Gospel to the “natural man” by reinterpreting it according to the principles of the “natural man”?

Wen, we have already observed that Kuitert, the leading exponent of the new hermeneutic of Holland is apparently unable to see the German hermeneutic for what it is. He has made a desperate effort to show that the whole philosophy of history of the historic Christian Confessions not only may but must be interpreted in terms of hermeneutical principles based on the idea of human autonomy, and a philosophy of cosmic process—a process philosophy that excludes the existence of the triune God of Scripture as the creator and redeemer of the universe.

Moreover, Kuitert is not alone in his effort to satisfy the demands of the historical consciousness

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of man as autonomous. His idea of the “historicness” of reality allows for no more independence of the God of Paul and the God of the Reformers than does modern existential philosophy or the philosophy such as that of Whitehead.

Other theologians too have adopted modern man’s view of himself as swimming in a bottomless and shoreless ocean of chance. We take brief note of but a few of them.

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1. Herman Wiersinga

Of those who stand with Kuitert Dr. Herman Wiersinga occupies a place of special importance. He wrote a very thorough and comprehensive work on *Reconciliation in Current Theological Discussion* (*De Verzoening in de Theologische Discussie*). We indicate in very brief fashion the fact that Wiersinga, like Kuitert, rejects the traditional methodology of theology and substitutes for it an approach similar to that of the German hermeneutic.

Kuitert concerns himself primarily with the problem of hermeneutical interpretation. Wiersinga concerns himself primarily with the content of teaching that follows from the modern method of hermeneutics. Between the two of them they are out to demolish all that has been taught in the past at the Free University of Amsterdam and in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands with respect to the doctrine of Scripture and with respect to the doctrines taught in Scripture. Their works supplement one another neatly.

Wiersinga centers his attention on the need of making the biblical message of atonement or reconciliation intelligible to modern man. More particularly he deals with the problematics of Christ's "satisfaction" to satisfy divine justice.²

² Herman Wiersinga, *De Verzoening in de Theologische Discussie* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1971), p. 10.

Must we speak of the wrath of God and of the necessity of placating this wrath?

Luther thought that the wrath of God comes to its most patent expression in the cross of Christ. “Christ took the wrath of God upon himself personally. He places himself so to speak between this wrath (of God) and man. In this way he bears and quiets the *ira Dei*.” According to Calvin the Statements of Scripture on the enmity of God are accommodated to our understanding, but this does not mean that they are inaccurate. According to Calvin as well as according to Luther the wrath of God must be quieted (*placatio*). Calvin does not hesitate to designate the ‘historical’ turn from wrath to grace (with the word) *placatio*, quieting.³

Turning to the Heidelberg Confession, says Wiersinga, we see the same idea expressed in the answer to question fourteen. It says explicitly that Christ bore “the burden of the wrath of God against sin.” Christ has taken our curse upon him. He placed himself before the tribunal of God and took the entire curse away from me. “The same sentiment is present in the N.G.B. and in the canons of Dordt. Thus it appears that not only Calvin but also the Confessions constructed in terms of his thinking describe the death of Christ on the cross “as a *placatio* of the wrath of God.”⁴

Turning now to recent theological discussion we discover that: according to it (1) God himself is the subject of wrath: (2) God’s wrath is motivated

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

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through the sin of man and (3) God's wrath is correlative to his love.⁵

Just as in the case of Scripture modern theology seeks to do justice to the human factor in biblical teaching with respect to atonement. The N.T. regards the turn from God's wrath to his grace as real. In the Son the triune God comes to us and turns his wrath away. Therewith he calls upon us to turn to him. God's turn toward us completes itself in correlation with our turn. Thus our faith is determinative and indispensable in our reconciliation.

The question remains whether we must speak of an objective turn in that Christ bore the wrath of God and placated it. The Heidelberg Catechism speaks constantly of liberating us from the wrath of God by bearing it for us. "But is this formulation based on proper Scripture exegesis?" What did Christ mean when he cried out on the cross, "My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?" What does Paul mean in the famous Galation 3:13 passage: "Christ has set us free from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us?" Did Christ give "satisfaction" to the wrath of God?" (Gal 3:13)⁶

Does God's justice require satisfaction?⁷ What was the nature of the work of Christ? What does it mean that Christ offered himself?⁸ What is the significance of the blood of Christ?⁹ Wiersinga's

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 33–37.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

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answer, to such questions, is that the satisfaction “theory” of atonement is not based on proper biblical exegesis.¹⁰

We need, he contends, to set forth an alternative view.¹¹ We must begin with the factuality of the suffering of Christ on the cross.¹² And then, of course, we must interpret this fact.

The Confession of 1967 may be thought of as a worthwhile effort to place our problems—interpersonal and international—into contact with the biblical history of reconciliation.¹³

Wiersinga says he seeks, for an alternative view along the lines of Reformational thinking and that means according to biblical patterns.¹⁴ These patterns must serve us as criteria.

The first criterion lies in the fact that the New Testament writers take history very seriously. Boman has spoken of Israelitish thinking as dynamic. This over against the static thinking of the Greeks.¹⁵

We must not theologize in a scholastic-metaphysical or in an existentialist-anthropological way. Apparently Wiersinga wants to follow the *via media* indicated by Kuitert. He refers at this point with approval to Kuitert’s work on *The Reality of*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 170.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

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Faith and to his discussion of the anti-metaphysical tendency thinking of present day theological development.

Secondly, Wiersinga wants, with Kuitert, to think along covenantal lines. The deeds of God and of man are covenantally related to one another.

If we think covenantally, i.e., historically, then we can escape the scholastic notion of competition between the deeds of God and of man. On this point Wiersinga appeals for support to Berkouwer. Berkouwer, it will be remembered, refuses to follow the use of causal categories of the synod of Dordt lest we fall into dualism and contradiction. Thirdly, the New Testament regards the history of redemption as a “still continuing history” (*nog-voortgaande geschiedenis*); “the atonement too is a not yet completed event.”¹⁶

The event on Golgotha, and the event of the present when we are confronted with the word of the cross—as we ourselves ‘administer’ the atonement and God speaks through the mouth of his ‘messengers’ 2 Cor 5, 2 Cor 5:18, 2 Cor 5:20 are in the nature of the case not identical, but they do lie on the same line of history (*maar liggen wel op de ene lijn van de geschiedenis*). Then God did his work, unrepeatable, and men responded to that work with their deeds: together atonement was effected (*samen kwam er verzoening tot stand*). “Now God does his work—the cross is ‘portrayed before our eyes,’ (Gal 3:1) unrepeatable, and men respond with their reactions: a new atonement is

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

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effected. Of course one can maintain that the redemptive history after the New Testament period is measured by the norm of salvation history ‘*an Heilsgeschichte normiert*’, i.e., by the revealed salvation history of Jesus’ first appearance, but we are concerned in both cases with history on the same level.”¹⁷

If we do not have this consciousness of “one continuing history in which the past, the present and the future are subject to the control of the living Lord the problem of the *der garstige breite Graben ...* which Lessing saw between the past of Jesus and my present today looms up before us.” We cannot then have a truly biblical view of atonement unless we think of it as taking place in (*inklusive Geschichte*). Kuitert was right in taking over this point of view from Barth.¹⁸

With Kuitert Wiersinga asserts that reconciliation is “a process that proceeds in the history of the church, in however fragmentary fashion. It is *Geschichte* in every present.”¹⁹

With the idea of atonement as taking place in inclusive *Geschichte* we can at last present the gospel of the New Testament in a way that modern man can understand it and that, primarily, because we now understand it ourselves better than we ever did before.²⁰

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 184–185.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

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We now look at Golgotha not as the place where the judgment of God comes down upon Christ but as the place where we men manifest ourselves in our deepest intentions. “Jesus provoked our guilt and called it forth.” On the other side we must accept the cross, as the undeniable and unsurpassable proof of the love of Jesus for men, even of God’s love for the world.” On the cross Jesus made “love unto the end” effective in the world.²¹

The first effect was repentance. The second effect is positive. We arise to newness of life. “Christ arises effectively: as the first of men, *qua homo novus*.” A revolution takes place. Atonement is administered.²²

Here then, says Wiersinga, is a doctrine of atonement “which does not proceed from the satisfaction idea but does seek to honor the biblical narrative of atonement.”²³

This alternative view of atonement is intelligible to modern man as the traditional view was not. Wiersinga again appeals to Kuitert at this point.²⁴ Modern man thinks in terms of the historicity of all reality. He can appreciate the presentation of the gospel “as a still proceeding act.” An “atonement-without-satisfaction” is clearly applicable, particularly “in the field of criminal law and that of the world of political relationships.”²⁵

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 190.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

It is apparent from this brief survey of Wiersinga's book that he is in basic agreement with Kuitert. Wiersinga's argument does not proceed with a fanfare of trumpets as does the argument of Kuitert but its basic supposedly anti-metaphysical assumption is the same as that of Kuitert, namely, that of process philosophy.

The thinking of both men is basically the same. Both men want to bring the gospel of Christ to modern man and both men, in seeking to do so reduce the gospel so that the natural man need see no scandal in it.

Where is the scandal for the natural man in a gospel that is based on human autonomy instead of upon the self-referential and self-attesting Christ of Scripture? Where is the scandal for the natural man in which Christ differs from other men on the one hand by being more basically contingent and on the other hand by being more basically identical with the idea of abstract rationality? And where is the intelligibility of a gospel in which the Christ, in terms of whom it is supposed to be made intelligible is nothing more than the intersection-point between the abstract principle of pure contingency and the abstract principle of fate?

Of course both men personally cling to the Christ of Luther and Calvin, but in speaking of this Christ to modern man both men use the categories of a Kantian philosophy and such a philosophy is destructive of the Christ of Scriptures.

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Wiersinga and Kuitert believe, G. C. Berkouwer has shown us that the gospel of sovereign grace could not be expressed in the causal categories of Dordt. We must, with him, avail ourselves of the modern personal categories more recently discovered.²⁶

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²⁶ *The writer has written fully on the radical turn-about of Berkouwer's method of theology in The Sovereignty of Grace (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company, 1969.)*

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2. G. P. Hartvelt

Doing so we shall realize that the Bible is not a book that has fallen from heaven. In his *Cahier* entitled, “On Scripture and Inspiration” (*over Schrift en Inspiratie*) G. P. Hartvelt informs us of this news three times.²⁷

3. J. Z. Koole

In his *Cahier*, “Narrative and Fact in the Old Testament” (*Verhaal en Feit in het Oude Testament*) Dr. J. Z. Koole speaks of those in former days who thought of Scripture as though it had been produced by a tape-recorder.²⁸ Such a view of Scripture is much too prosaic. Moreover, if we hold a tape-recorder view of Scripture we cannot do justice to the variety of Scripture (*genuanceerdheid van de Schrift zelf*). In short the tape-recorder view of Scripture cannot do justice to the human factor in the development of biblical history-writing.”²⁹

4. F. J. Baarda

In his *Cahier* “The Trustworthiness of the Gospels” (*De Betrouwbaarheid van de Evangelien*) Dr. F. J. Baarda asks, with a backward glance at the

²⁷ G. P. Hartvelt, *Over Schrift en Inspiratie, Cahiers voor de Gemeente No. 3* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1967) pp. 19, 26, 66.

²⁸ J. Z. Koole. *Verhaal en Feit in het Oude Testament, Cahiers voor de Gemeente No. 1* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, n.d.). p. 45.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

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Reformed fathers, what happens to our belief in the resurrection of Christ if we give up our belief in the snake of paradise?"³⁰ We no longer share Abraham Kuyper's "holy synthesis" between an absolutely infallible Bible and "facts" that we cannot harmonize with it. What happens to our belief in the resurrection when the snake slithers back into the jungle? Nothing at all! The message of resurrection is no more verifiable than the snake. In both cases it is a matter of belief not a matter of historical verifiability. (*De boodschap van Pasen is historich gezien niet verifieerbaar*) "It was not the crucified one who was resurrected, but the Living One."³¹

It is obvious that Baarda is operating with the *Geschiedte-Historie* scheme of neo-orthodoxy. It is confidence in the usefulness of this scheme for the propagation of the gospel that moves the *Cahier* men to reject "the causal-formal-static-mechanical" framework of the Reformed Confessions. The view of Scripture of their theological forebears is said to take no notice of the content of Scripture and of the purpose for which God gave it to man.

This is out of accord with the actual situation. One need only to read Bavinck's discussion on Scripture to realize this fact. According to Bavinck the Scripture gives expression to the love of the triune God in the saving of his people from their sin. The traditional view of Scripture has the living God and his saving work among men as its content while the modern view has the meaningless idea of the Christ-Event of

³⁰ T. J. Baarda, *De Betrouwbaarheid van de Evangelien*, *Cahiers voor de Gemeente* No. 2 (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1967). p. 5.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

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neo-orthodoxy for its content. The two opposing views of Scripture are built upon and give expression to two mutually opposing views of the triune God of Scripture. Our modern experience, says Baarda, teaches us to think God is like an artist “who does not shun dissonance.”³²

The *Cahier* men apparently do not realize that in committing themselves to the notions of the “historical consciousness” and the “historicness” of all reality, they have, to all, intents and purposes, joined covenant-breaking men in holding down the truth in unrighteousness.

The men of the new hermeneutic of Holland have back of them the Reformed theology of such men as Kuyper and Bavinck. They have back of them the exegetical and hermeneutical works of such men as Grosheide and Greydanus. In the theology of such men as Kuyper and Bavinck and in the hermeneutical writings of such men as Grosheide and Greydanus the *Cahier* men could have found the wherewithal to set a truly Christ- and Scripture-centered hermeneutic over against the man-centered hermeneutic of such men as Fuchs and Ebeling.

Instead of doing this they have developed a hermeneutic that is both God-centered and man-centered. The new hermeneutic of Holland comprises a synthesis of Christ and of Kant in the way that the hermeneutic of Roman Catholicism comprises a synthesis of Christ and of Aristotle.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 41.

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5. C. Augustijn

The net result is well expressed in the *Cahier* of Dr. C. Augustijn entitled “Church and Confession” (*Kerk en Belijdenis*). Augustijn is out to destroy the normative nature of the Confession and, back of it, the normative nature of Scripture. To be sure, Augustijn argues, the church must continue to confess that the Bible alone is the standard of faith and life and we should, perhaps, continue to use a confession. But then we must make sure that such a confession expresses what all the members of the church agree as constituting the meaning of Scripture. And our present Confessions do not express any such thing as a present consensus of opinion with respect to what Scripture teaches.³³

Why continue then to be so greatly concerned with the question of the authority of Scripture? “There are larger questions today; the unity of all men, war and peace, proper assignment of wealth, the limits of science etc. etc. These are questions for all mankind and therefore also questions for the church.”³⁴

Let us then do away with Confessions traditional style: “A declaration of the Reformed Churches, which determines that the government, the churches and its members should devote a certain percentage of their income to social development

³³ C. Augustijn, *Kerk en Belijdenis Cahiers voor de Gemeente No. 7* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1969) pp. 69–70.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

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causes is worth more than every tie to an old or a new Confession.”³⁵

Augustijn sees a great future for the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands. Taking a view of their Confessions such as he advocates, these churches are ready to join the ecumenical movement of neo-Protestantism. Thus we ask why they should not join others in forming a new protestant-Romanist church all worshipping the Christ-event of the Aristotle-Kant axis?

We may think of Augustijn’s *Cahier* as a fitting conclusion of the series. Together they are, as rapidly as possible, preparing the people for a smooth transition from the worship of the Christ of Reformed Confessions to the worship of the Christ, who is a projection of would be self-sufficient moral consciousness of man. The new hermeneutic of Germany says that love, love of all men, love regardless of the justice and holiness of the God of Scripture is God. The new hermeneutic of Holland is striving to effect a synthesis between the Christ of Scripture who, by being made sin for men bears the wrath of God resting upon them in their place, and the Christ of neo-orthodoxy, the unknown and unknowable Christ, of would-be autonomous man.

All of the men just mentioned have in a series of booklets called *Primers for the Church* (*Cahiers voor de Gemeent*) sought to popularize and make acceptable to simple Christians the neo-orthodox view of Scripture as embedded in the idea of the

³⁵ *Ibid.*

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Christ-Event as the all-encompassing event of history.

In the body of this work considerable attention was paid to the writings of Dr. S. U. Zuidema. Zuidema is deeply aware of the betrayal of the historic Reformed Faith accomplished by such men as Kuitert and his colleagues. Zuidema would base all human thinking and living on the unproblematic Scripture in which Berkouwer too formerly believed. Others having the same or similar convictions might be mentioned. With them we would appeal to the Cahier's men, to Wiersinga and to others, to build their hermeneutical procedures on the theology of Calvin, Kuyper, Bavinck, etc., and then in terms of it to challenge all men to repentance and faith in the self-identifying Christ of Scripture instead of making compromise with unbelief.

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⁷Van Til, C. (1974). *The New Hermeneutic*. The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company: Phillipsburg, NJ.