

War Time Preaching and Teaching

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By

Jeffrey Jon Richards

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Dedicated to two wonderful daughters

**Lauren Meredith Richards Rosenfarb
and
Emily Katherine Richards**

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PREFACE

Both Bultmann and Bonhoeffer have interested me for many years, and eventually the prospect of writing concerning their method of interpreting and presenting the Scriptures nurtured and became an adventure. Both theologians are somewhat misunderstood, and it seems they are either totally accepted or rejected, depending in many instances upon one's personal understanding of the method of biblical interpretation. This work attempts to objectively view their methods and how they expressed their research in their writings, preaching and teaching. Both concluded that the presenting of the Gospel in a relevant manner is the ultimate message for humankind today.

Bultmann and Bonhoeffer both lived during a most challenging period of world history, and they proclaimed the Gospel in a captivating manner. Certainly the times in which we live today call for those who possess a similar commitment.

INTRODUCTION

A. Traditional Views of Bonhoeffer and Bultmann

The typical caricature of Dietrich Bonhoeffer seemingly is either that of a splendid theologian who had a gift for coining revolutionary theological phrases or one who was able to write clear and concise letters during devastating air raids while being held prisoner by the Nazis. Many American theologians have attempted to make Bonhoeffer the source of some of the more non-orthodox theologies of the 1960s. In some instances, he seems to be almost impervious to theological classification since theologians of varied persuasions quote his words and cite his life experiences. Many American theologians, especially during the decade of the 1960s, quoted several phrases which he wrote, such as “world come of age” or “religionless Christianity.” However, one aspect of this theologian’s contribution which is greatly minimized is his understanding of hermeneutics and its relationship to homiletics.

Having lived only to age thirty-nine, one can only speculate what else he might have accomplished had he lived a longer life. In many measures, he lived a life of privilege as his father was a well-known psychiatrist, and all indications are that he was raised in a loving family. His father, Karl Bonhoeffer, was stern but approachable. His mother, Paula, was a caring if not somewhat doting mother to her eight children. Dietrich was strong physically as a child. His family did not encourage him to study theology, and some members thought that the life of a pastor would leave him endlessly bored.

Bonhoeffer did not live in a theological desert; in fact, the converse was the situation. He came under the influence of Germany’s leading theologians, and he was heir to many diverse theological currents peculiar to Europe between World War II. Much of the theology Bonhoeffer acquired, he reworked; thus, it bore his personality, features, and thought. However, one can always see upon closer inspection the vestige of his mentors such as Barth, Harnack, Heidegger, Seeberg, and Schlatter.¹

¹ Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 53-54, 116. Though Bonhoeffer disagreed with Schlatter over the latter’s support of National Socialism, Bonhoeffer held Schlatter in high esteem, and

How should one sift through the thoughts and influences of Bonhoeffer? In Germany the literature concerning Bonhoeffer comprises basically two schools.

The first is that of Gerhard Ebeling and his endeavor to search through the implications of the *Letters and Papers from Prison*. The second, usually credited to Eberhard Bethge, sees Christology as the *Leitmotiv*. In America there seemingly is a division between those who see Bonhoeffer's work as ecclesiological and others who believe the theme of discipleship is more prevalent.² Of course, there are innumerable approaches and themes which have not been utilized. This work will explore the connection between Bultmann's and Bonhoeffer's hermeneutical and homiletical systems.

The primary supposition of this book is that for Bultmann exegesis leads to preaching and for Bonhoeffer preaching leads to exegesis. Each had a vital concern for authentic communication.

Rudolf Bultmann died in the summer of 1976, a short period of time after the death of Martin Heidegger.³ The result of his teaching at Marburg for thirty years and extensive work after his retirement assured the continuing impact of his scholarship.

Bultmann was born at Wiefelstede, Oldenburg, on August 20, 1884. He was a student at Marburg and like Bonhoeffer, he studied at both Tübingen and Berlin. He held teaching positions at both Breslau and Giessen before returning to Marburg as a professor of New Testament in 1921. Retiring in 1951, Bultmann had already gained international attention as a scholar. He gave the Shaffer Lectures at Yale in 1951 and the Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh University in 1955.

he seemingly was the only professor from his time of studies in Tübingen who had a lasting impression on him. Bultmann also studied with Schlatter during his three terms as a student at Tübingen. Bethge specifically states that Bonhoeffer identified with the scholarship that he read in Bultmann. Cf. Martin Evang, *Rudolf Bultmann in seiner Frühzeit* (Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck, 1988), 8-21. Evang lists all the courses which Bultmann studied as a student in Tübingen, Berlin and Marburg Universities.

² Dallas M. Roark, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Waco: Word Books, 1972). 28-9.

³ Some claim the actual date of "the beginning of the end" came in 1954 with Ernst Käsemann's critique, "Das Problem des historischen Jesus," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 51 (1954): 125 ff. Cf. Schubert Ogden, "The Significance of Rudolf Bultmann for Contemporary Theology" in *The Theology of Rudolf Bultmann*, ed., Charles W. Kegley (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 117-26.

His father, Arthur Bultmann, was an Evangelical-Lutheran pastor.⁴ His maternal grandfather was a pastor in the pietistic tradition, while his paternal grandfather was a missionary to Africa. Rudolf married in 1916, and he had two daughters.

Bultmann, claimed that his theology had no relationship to the chaos produced by World War I:

So I do not believe that the war has influenced my theology My view is that if anyone is looking for the genesis of our theology he will find that internal discussion with the theologies of our teachers play an incomparably greater role than the impact of the war or reading Dostoevsky.⁵

Bultmann is greatly indebted to one of his teachers, Wilhelm Herrmann. But it was Heidegger who primarily influenced Bultmann.⁶

Bultmann was a very systematic and scientific theologian and New Testament scholar who in a sense saw himself as a modern-day Luther who strongly disagreed with nineteenth-century liberalism. His desire was to revive the Lutheran doctrine of *sola fides*, and Bultmann believed this emphasis to be the means to presenting the New Testament in order to present a message of meaning for modern humankind. Günther Bornkamm believes that “Bultmann cannot accept any ‘objective’ revelatory realm of being that can be recognized, established, and understood in and by itself prior to its relation to faith.”⁷

Bultmann consistently held to the same theological position for over half a century, though there are some who claim he did not.⁸ Roberts claims:

⁴ Roger Johnson, ed., “Introduction”, *Rudolf Bultmann: Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era*. Collins Liturgical Press, San Francisco, 1987), 9.

⁵ Walter Schmidhals, *An Introduction to the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann*, Trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1968), 9-10.

⁶ Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 132-133. Bethge uses the phrase “accident of locality” to refer to Bultmann and Heidegger in Marburg. Bultmann was heavily dependent upon Heidegger’s philosophy and though Bonhoeffer criticized Bultmann for what he believed was overdependence on Heidegger, Bonhoeffer quoted extensively the latter in his *Act and Being*.

⁷ Gunther Bornkamm, “The Theology of Rudolf Bultmann,” in *The Theology of Rudolf Bultmann*, ed., C. W. Kegley (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 16.

⁸ Roberts, states: “. . . as far as I can tell, Bultmann has not changed his mind on any issue of importance since the early 1920’s.” Robert C. Roberts, *Rudolf Bultmann’s Theology: A Critical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 9.

“We cannot avoid the impression that this work is an extraordinary unity, exhibiting the touch of a master German thinker who knows how to hold his every thought in place by the power of a single idea.”⁹

B. Towards an Interpretation of the Relationship of Bultmann and Bonhoeffer

1. Synthesis

Is it possible to correlate Bultmann’s and Bonhoeffer’s thought? The “Bultmannian synthesis” as expressed by Gerhard Ebeling and Ronald Gregor Smith continues to be an interpretation of Bonhoeffer’s theological contribution. Woelfel cogently writes:

Central to the Bultmann-inspired outlook on Bonhoeffer is the two-fold assumption that Bultmann has from the beginning fully and explicitly shared Bonhoeffer’s intense concern for the communication of the gospel to modern secular man, and furthermore that Bonhoeffer’s “dereligionizing” of biblical concepts and Bultmann’s demythologizing of the New Testament are much closer together, both in intention and in execution, than Bonhoeffer imagined.¹⁰

Essentially Woelfel is stating this attempt for a synthesis between Bultmann and Bonhoeffer encompasses the areas of hermeneutics and homiletics. Bethge gives another understanding of the connection between Bultmann and Bonhoeffer:

The interest of the existential interpretation lies clearly with the individual, which encourages a sterility toward the kinds of questions that transcend the individual. Because of this it has been noted that there is a connection between Bultmann’s theology and the pietistic world that Bonhoeffer termed “religious.”¹¹

⁹ Roberts, *Rudolf Bultmann’s Theology: A Critical Interpretation*, 21.

¹⁰ James W. Woelfel, *Bonhoeffer’s Theology* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1970), 295-296.

¹¹ Bethge *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 875. Cf. John deGruchy, *Introduction to Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Witness to Jesus Christ*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988), 38. According to de Gruchy, Bonhoeffer sees religion as a genuine hindrance to genuine dependence upon Christ.

2. Difference

It is possible to compare Bultmann and Bonhoeffer in many facets of theology. This book has alluded to Woelfel's reference to a "Bultmannian synthesis." However, there are some who believe that one should not see a great similarity between these two theologians:

Bultmann calls for an "existential" interpretation, Bonhoeffer a "nonreligious" one; but it is by no means self-evident that the two theologians mean the same thing. Bultmann thinks in the anthropological terms of man's self-understanding, Bonhoeffer in the "theanthropological" terms of the new reality eternally uniting God and the world in Jesus Christ. For Bultmann "demythologizing" involves the academic question of hermeneutics, namely, the question of interpreting the Bible by means of "existentials" of Heidegger's existentialist philosophy in order to disclose the biblical understanding of human existence. On the other hand, Bonhoeffer's "dereligionizing" is concerned not only with the hermeneutical question, but with the question of existence of the church itself For Bonhoeffer, Bultmann's interpretation is too introspective and individualistic, and thus too religious.¹²

Dumas expresses many interesting insights into the thought of Bultmann and Bonhoeffer. He claims that Bultmann is more intellectual; Bonhoeffer conversely is a person of action in both a spiritual and political sense. Bultmann emphasizes the free gift of salvation, whereas Bonhoeffer is more interested in the problem of worldly responsibility.¹³ Dumas claims: "Just as Bultmann put demythologization at the service of existential interpretation, Bonhoeffer puts the 'nonreligious interpretation of Christianity' at the service of his theological method, which is to speak of God in the midst of man's everyday life in the world."¹⁴

However, Dumas believes there is a fundamental difference in the two. Bultmann operates within the structure of transcendental Kantianism; thus, miracles are excluded. Bonhoeffer, though, operates within an incarnational Hegelianism which emphasizes the value of the miraculous.¹⁵

Perhaps Palmer offers a helpful insight:

¹² John D. Godsey, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1958), 278-79.

¹³ Andre Dumas, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian of Reality*, trans. Robert McAfee Brown (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1968), 18-19.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 246-49.

Bonhoeffer differs from Bultmann in holding that mythology is not the problem, and existentialism is not the answer. Where Bultmann wants to replace biblical (“mythological”) categories with better (existential) ones, Bonhoeffer seeks to replace traditional Christian (“religious”) categories with more biblical ones. Nonreligious interpretation is more radical than demythologizing in the sense that it forswears reliance on metaphysics and inwardness, and focuses instead on God’s identification with the world in Christ, culminating in the cross.¹⁶

3. Common Situation: Post-Liberal Theology

Like Bultmann, Bonhoeffer was a child of the German liberal heritage. His professors, however, represented a variety of theological positions; some were more liberal than others. He was indebted to such profound theologians as Ernst Troeltsch, Karl Holl, Reinhold Seeberg, Adolf Schlatter and Adolf von Harnack. It would be possible to ferret through the thought of each one of these theological giants and point to similarities between each one and Bonhoeffer, but perhaps such a venture is impractical and unwarranted. Bonhoeffer’s personal passion for individualism would possibly rebuff one for such an attempt. However, Woelfel is correct in remarking:

The lasting influence of Adolf Harnack upon his young Berlin neighbor and university student Bonhoeffer was his passion for truth and his intellectual integrity. . . . The passion for truth and intellectual honesty which Bonhoeffer learned from Harnack appears again and again in his writings. All of Bonhoeffer’s writings, discussing wide-ranging topics such as church and state, war and peace, history and philosophy, as well as purely theological and exegetical themes, display a painstaking careful concern to clarify precisely the issues involved and to offer concrete solutions based on explicit premises.¹⁷

While not resurrecting the doctrine of *sola fides* as did Bultmann, Bonhoeffer as the latter was greatly influenced by the Lutheran tradition. Woelfel states:

Another formative influence in Bonhoeffer’s theological development was his adherence to Lutheran Christianity. He was profoundly molded by the personality and thought of Luther himself, as well as by the theological emphases and ethos of the Lutheran tradition. Bonhoeffer must always be

¹⁶ Russell W. Palmer, “Demythologization and Non-Religious Interpretation: A Comparison of Bultmann and Bonhoeffer,” *The Iliff Review* 31 (Spring 1974): 15.

¹⁷ Woelfel, *Bonhoeffer’s Theology*, 20.

seen within this context, for it gave to his “religionless Christianity” some of its most distinctive, not to say paradoxical and puzzling, characteristics. Many of the riddles and seeming antinomies in Bonhoeffer’s prison writings can be resolved only if he is seen to the very end as a Lutheran churchman.¹⁸

However, one disadvantage (some believe it to be an advantage) is that all of Bonhoeffer’s writings have not been retained. The corpus of Bultmann’s writings are more complete. There are problems and questions in Bonhoeffer’s system which remain unanswered. Godsey states:

What does Bonhoeffer have in mind when he speaks of “natural” piety and “unconscious Christianity,” which he links with the differentiation that the old Lutheran dogmaticians made between *fides directa* and *fides reflexa*? These must all remain tantalizing questions for us, but perhaps this is not a misfortune. Indeed, perhaps one of the reasons why Bonhoeffer’s theology is so fascinating and stimulating is because it was cut off in the midst of a great thrust of creativity, because we do *not* have all the answers!¹⁹

Bonhoeffer refuses to be part of a “cookie cutter” mentality. Even though a protégé of Germany’s greatest liberal tradition, one is always not cognizant of the fact that Bonhoeffer felt somewhat estranged from the great nineteenth-century theologians’ thought and systems. Bethge sums up cogently Bonhoeffer’s feelings:

Despite his respect for the greatness of the nineteenth century and its church father, Schleiermacher, Bonhoeffer believed that this *a priori* obscured the Reformation. He viewed Seeberg and his friends with their anthropological and theological optimism, as incapable of understanding the collapse and crisis that followed the First World War, and thereby incapable of interpreting those events to his generation. For Seeberg and others, the collapse did not give birth to a fundamental reappraisal of ideas; for them, the war had merely been an unhappy episode.²⁰

Bethge states that Bonhoeffer broke with Seeberg in 1933 over the issue of the Church struggle.²¹

Bonhoeffer, then, refuses to be placed in a nice, neat theological slot. One can hardly say that he was in sympathy with the German liberal tradition. However, it is not possible to say that he was a dialectical theologian, though he did have a high regard for Karl Barth. As Barth, he

¹⁸ Ibid., 72.

¹⁹ Godsey, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 279.

²⁰ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 71.

²¹ Ibid., 72.

too was vitally interested in the Reformation concept of revelation. However, revelation for Bonhoeffer was inextricably connected with ecclesiology. Actually, Bonhoeffer considered the dialectical method too abstract and one that placed too much attention upon the individual.²² It cannot be justified to merely view Bonhoeffer as just another dissenting, radical, young theologian attempting to ignore theological tradition. However, it would not be correct to state that he was void of such a temperament. Godsey claims:

How Bonhoeffer, as an exponent of the new theology, joins the battle against “liberalism” on the left and Roman Catholicism on the right, while at the same time criticizing the new movement from within, provides an unusual introduction to the main issues facing contemporary Protestant theology.²³

4. Post-Liberal Theology After World War I: Bultmann’s Post-Liberal Theology

The issue of how to proceed in theological studies, or theological method, is of primary concern for Bultmann. Kegley writes pertaining to this topic:

In the central claims that a new way must be discovered for interpreting the Bible and communicating its message to contemporary man, namely, that of demythologizing and existential interpretation, two now clearly defined points of view have developed. Method is at issue of both.²⁴

Bultmann’s methodology manifests itself in the following twofold manner: first in demythologization (*Entmythologisierung*) of the biblical message and next in expressing the existential analysis (*Daseinanalyse*) of the gospel message.²⁵

Bultmann realizes that premises (*Voraussetzungen*) are crucial in the manner in which one approaches the question of method in theology. Bultmann writes:

A comprehension – an interpretation – is, it follows, constantly oriented to a particular formulation of a question, a particular “objective.” But

²² Godsey, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 14-15.

²³ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁴ Charles W. Kegley, Preface to *The Theology of Rudolf Bultmann*, ed., C. W. Kegley (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), XII.

²⁵ Thomas C. Oden, *Radical Obedience* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 47.

included in this, therefore, is the fact that it is never without its own presuppositions; or, to put it more precisely, that it is governed always by a prior understanding of the subject, in accordance with which it investigates the text. The formulation of a question, and an interpretation, is possible at all only on the basis of such a prior understanding.²⁶

Bultmann believes that exegesis without presuppositions is not possible: “. . . We must say that there cannot be any such thing as presuppositionless exegesis.”²⁷ He builds his system upon the premises of the historical method for the interpretation of the New Testament; he claims, “Indeed, exegesis as the interpretation of historical texts is a part of the science of history.”²⁸ Bultmann holds to the position that an understanding of the use of grammar and the manner in which words are constructed is highly significant, and that “. . . every text speaks in the language of its time and of its historical setting.”²⁹ He holds to the presupposition that Scripture is similar to documents of history; thus, one must approach the study of the New Testament in a similar manner.³⁰

Everything in the world operates according to the law of cause and effect: “The historical method presupposes that it is possible . . . to understand the whole historical process as a closed unity.”³¹ Neo-Kantianism inherently excludes the possibility of the miraculous, and God is perceived in a *deus absconditus* manner. Bultmann grounds his theology in the scientific method, and the emphasis is placed upon science. He writes: “In any case, modern science does not believe that the course of nature can be interrupted or, so to speak, perforated by supernatural power.”³²

Bultmann believes that those who lived in the New Testament era were obviously unsophisticated in terms of a scientific understanding of the

²⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, *Essays Philosophical and Theological*, Trans. James C. Grieb (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), 239.

²⁷ Rudolf Bultmann, *Existence and Faith*, Trans. Schubert Ogden (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1960), 289. Cf. Bultmann, “Ist Voraussetzunglose Exegese Möglich?” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 13 (1957), 409-17.

²⁸ Bultmann, *Existence and Faith*, 291.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Reason came to be seen as superior to faith which had been emphasized during the Medieval period. Instead of *fides quae creditor*, the emphasis was placed upon *sola ratione*. Johann Salomo Semler (1725-91), a Halle professor, is usually credited with being the initiator of the historical-critical method.

³¹ Bultmann, *Existence and Faith*, 291.

³² Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and Mythology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 15.

cosmos, and they would readily accept the concept of the miraculous; thus, it is not necessary for the modern-day person to accept accounts in the Bible of such things as literally resurrecting from the dead, walking on water, and believing in the devil and angels. To ask people today to accept such beliefs would require a *sacrificium intellectus*. The concept of myth is that ideas which are other worldly are presented in such a manner that they appear to be part of the known world.³³

At this point Bonhoeffer disagrees with Bultmann:

You can't as Bultmann supposes, separate God and miracle, but you must be able to interpret and proclaim both in a "nonreligious" sense. Bultmann's approach is fundamentally still a liberal one (i.e. abridging the gospel), whereas I'm trying to think theologically.³⁴

Though Bultmann holds that myth must be demythologized, he still claims that the mythological elements are needed and must not be abandoned. Edwin M. Good's explanation is helpful:

Therefore, the angels, demons, miracles, and so forth which play such a significant role in the worldview of the New Testament, must be interpreted in terms of their contribution to the New Testament's understanding of human existence.³⁵

Though the biblical view of the world is not to be accepted literally, the mythological elements therein give understanding concerning the human experience.

Bultmann believes that the Scriptures ". . . must be translated, and translation is the task of historical science."³⁶ Bultmann, then, attempts to remove that which he believes is unnecessary through the hermeneutical process of demythologization in order to discover the true existential meaning which is encased in the unscientific *Weltanschauung* in Scripture.³⁷

³³ Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth*, ed., H.W. Bartsch, trans. R.H. Fuller (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 10.

³⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, Inc., 1978), 285.

³⁵ Edwin M. Good, "The Meaning of Demythologization," in *The Theology of Rudolf Bultmann*, ed., C. W. Kegley (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 26.

³⁶ Bultmann, *Existence and Faith*, 292.

³⁷ Form criticism claims to be able to distinguish between individualized styles of writing in the Gospels. Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1921).

The issue of history was of primary concern for Bultmann.³⁸ In particular, he is interested in how history relates to the ultimate goal of *Daseinanalyse*. There is a connection between the interpreter of Scripture and the biblical text. Bultmann explains:

. . . the subject matter with which the text is concerned also concerns us and is a problem for us. If we approach history alive with our own problems, then it really begins to speak to us. Through discussion the past becomes alive, and in learning to know history we learn to know our present; historical knowledge is at the same time knowledge of ourselves.³⁹

Bultmann considers the concept of *Vorverständnis* (preunderstanding) of the interpreter to be highly significant. He states, “Man has a *Vorverständnis* of all things, because ‘deep down’ he is all things, including God.”⁴⁰

Bultmann writes: “For the facts of the past become historical phenomena only as they become meaningful to a subject who stands within history and participates in it, i.e., as they speak—which they can do only to a subject who understands them.”⁴¹ Bultmann distinguished between “existential” and “existentialist.” The word *existentielle* alludes to an individual’s involvement with an issue at a deeply personal level, as Bultmann states, one “. . . participates in it with his whole existence.”⁴²

Wilhelm Dilthey and Neo-Hegelian thought impacted Bultmann’s view of history, and he accepted the view of the distinction between *Geschichte* and *Historie*.⁴³ The challenges of how to interpret history he believes can be overcome by placing the emphasis upon encountering, which is inherently found within the concept of *Existentielle*. Bultmann believes, “The presupposition for understanding is the interpreter’s

³⁸ “Rudolf Bultmann’s Philosophy of History,” in *The Theology of Rudolf Bultmann*, 51.

³⁹ Bultmann, *Existence and Faith*, 294.

⁴⁰ Andre Malet, *The Thought of Rudolf Bultmann*, trans. Richard Strachan (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1971), 15.

⁴¹ Bultmann, *Essays Philosophical and Theological*, 254.

⁴² Bultmann, *Existence and Faith*, 294. Cf. Roger A. Johnson, *Introduction to Rudolf Bultmann: Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era*. (Collins, San Francisco, 1987), 22. Johnson describes Bultmann’s distinction between “existential” and “existentialist.” The former relates to an human being experiencing his/her own existence and making choices which have significance for the future, while the latter alludes to a particular method of interpreting existence.

⁴³ Rudolf Bultmann, *History and Eschatology* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1962), 110-137.

relationship in his life to the subject, which is directly or indirectly expressed in the text.”⁴⁴

In Bultmann’s understanding, “. . . historical knowledge is never closed or definitive knowledge.”⁴⁵ There is no fixed manner in which to understand the Bible since the Bible confronts one in his/her personal life situation. Bultmann says, “The *existentiell* decision out of which the interpretation emerges cannot be passed on, but must always be realized anew.”⁴⁶ Thus, to Bultmann, simply viewing and interpreting Scripture merely according to an historical view is insufficient because “always anew it will tell him who he, man, is and who God is, and he will always have to express this word in a new conceptuality.”⁴⁷ Bultmann adds: “To each historical phenomenon belongs its future, a future in which alone it will appear as that which it really is For ultimately it will show itself in its very essence only when history has reached its end.”⁴⁸ The following, then, are Bultmann’s premises for the exegesis of biblical texts: 1. the historical-critical method is the foundation for historical research; 2. the universe is closed and operates according to cause and effect; 3. preunderstanding (*Vorverständnis*) assures that there will be an *existentielle* decision on the part of the individual; and 4. there is an incessant openness to the future since a mere historical understanding of the scriptural text is insufficient.

Malet claims that inherent within existentialist philosophy, *Dasein*, or *being*, is ultimately an expression of what is termed *ec-sistance*, which can be translated as “. . . to stand forth from oneself”⁴⁹ Thus, the person in his/her essence, the “I”, can choose either for authenticity or non-authenticity. To live authentically, one must not choose the temporal, or that which is associated with the world, for to do so would be to choose the opposite of authenticity. Schubert Ogden believes:

To be a man is to be continually confronted with the decision. . . whether to “lose” oneself in the past constituted by one’s inner and outer world or rather to become the new future self that it is always being offered one to become.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Ibid., 123.

⁴⁵ Bultmann, *Existence and Faith*, 294.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 296.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Bultmann, *History and Eschatology*, 120.

⁴⁹ Malet, *The Thought of Rudolf Bultmann*, 5.

⁵⁰ Schubert Ogden, Introduction to *Existence and Faith*, by Rudolf Bultmann, 16.

Johnson claims that Bultmann's theology is based upon a fusion between Marburg Neo-Kantianism and Lutheran anthropology.⁵¹

It is doubtful if Bultmann would agree that there is a dualistic division in his theology. But interestingly, he states that when he reads the Scriptures he finds

. . . . a curious contradiction which runs right through the New Testament. Sometimes we are told that human life is determined by cosmic forces, at others we are challenged to a decision. Side by side with the Pauline indicative stands the Pauline imperative. In short, man is sometimes regarded as a cosmic being, sometimes as an independent "I" for whom decision is a matter of life or death.⁵²

Thus, Bultmann believes that since there is oppositional thought found in Scripture, it is justifiable to go beyond the Bible to enlist the enablement of existentialist philosophy which will help one to understand more fully the New Testament. Bultmann writes:

Our task . . . is to discover the hermeneutical principle by which we can understand what is said in the Bible In other words, the question of the "right" philosophy arises Our question is simply which philosophy today offers the most adequate perspective and conceptions for understanding human existence.⁵³

5. Post-Liberal Theology during World War: Bonhoeffer's Post-Liberal Theology

Bonhoeffer's preoccupation with religion was intense, and one of his most famous phrases is "religionless Christianity,"⁵⁴ In 1944 he wrote: "I am gradually working on my way to the non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts."⁵⁵ To understand Bonhoeffer's concern with this issue, one must understand how he defines the word "religion." Bethge suggests that Bonhoeffer's interpretation of the word encompasses the following elements: metaphysics, individualism, partiality, privilege, *deus ex machina*, tutelage, guardianship and dispensability.⁵⁶ Perhaps these factors

⁵¹ Roger A. Johnson, *The Origins of Demythologization*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 86.

⁵² Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. H.W. Bartsch, Trans. R.H. Fuller (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 11-12.

⁵³ Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 54-55.

⁵⁴ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, pp. 871-79.

⁵⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 359.

⁵⁶ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 872-878.

can be summarized by stating that religion has become egocentric, “I” centered instead of “other” orientated. However, Dumas sees its as meaning “pretense.”⁵⁷

Bethge comments upon these self-centered features of religion:

We may ask whether such characteristics must necessarily be features of “religion.” Bonhoeffer considered them to be actually present, and believed that religion, with these characteristics, had become a western phenomenon, thus limiting the challenge and the nature of Jesus to a very specific direction. But this direction leads us into dead ends and should be abandoned⁵⁸

How does this relate to his concept of “religionless Christianity”? Bethge claims that this is not a good English translation and the phrase has done some injustice to Bonhoeffer. In Coventry Cathedral on October 30, 1967, Bethge claimed: “The isolated use and handing down of the famous term, ‘religionless Christianity’ has made Bonhoeffer the champion of an undialectical shallow modernism which obscures all that he wanted to tell us of the living God.”⁵⁹ What then is “religionless Christianity”? According to Godsey, it encompasses the following elements: (1) the abolishing of ecclesiastical self-interest and clerical arrogance; (2) preaching is not sufficient, the Church must also live the Gospel; (3) the Church must become the instrument for proclaiming the Gospel; however, it must employ nonreligious language; (4) the Church must regain her own peculiar life.⁶⁰ Perhaps these points by Godsey can be summarized by stating that the Church needs to be active in the world but still retain her own identification. There must be *Gemeinschaft* among the community of believers, but the *Verkündigung* of the Gospel must also take place in the world. The *Predigtwort* is not only for the *ekklesia* but also for the *Welt*.

Bonhoeffer’s concept of religion, which is encapsulated in the phrase “non-religious Christianity,” came to be somewhat of a departure from his earlier understanding of the word. In *Akt und Sein*, his inaugural address of 1931, Bonhoeffer seemingly understood “religion” in a different manner as compared with his later years.

⁵⁷ Dumas, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian of Reality*, 207.

⁵⁸ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 873.

⁵⁹ Mary Bosanquet, *The Life and Death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 279, quoted in Clyde Fant, *Bonhoeffer: Worldly Preaching* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1975), 78.

⁶⁰ Godsey, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 273.

What reason can learn from itself (thus Hegel) is revelation, and so God is incarnated in consciousness. Through living refection on itself, the I understands itself from itself. It directly relates to itself, hence to God, in reflexion. It follows that religion is here equivalent to revelation.⁶¹

He seemingly previously saw religion as *Offenbarung*; thus, his understanding was similar to that of Karl Barth's. Fant, however, believes that he saw religion as a synonym for faith.⁶²

Another key phrase in Bonhoeffer's thought is that of "world come of age." He does not have in mind with this phrase an evolutionary scheme or even the idea of concern for this world as opposed to the eternal. Connected with this phrase is that of "this-worldliness."

By this-worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world – watching with Christ in Gethsemane.⁶³

A phrase that is somewhat more mysterious in its meaning is that of "secret discipline." Bonhoeffer writes: "There are degrees of knowledge and degrees of significance; that means that a secret discipline must be restored whereby the mysteries of the Christian faith are protected from profanation."⁶⁴ What is the meaning of *Arkandiziplin*? Paul Lehman claims that this term is one of the more obscure of Bonhoeffer's. Fant suggests that the origin of the phrase comes from the early Christian practice of separating preaching from the Lord's Supper. Only a select group could participate in the latter.⁶⁵ William Hamilton and William Lillie understand "secret discipline" as alluding to Bonhoeffer's desire that the Church become hidden in her worship.⁶⁶ Dumas understands Bonhoeffer's desire for a "secret discipline" by citing three reasons as follows: (1) either because men cannot understand the language of faith; (2) or because prayer, suffering, and the sacraments are a more significant means of expressing the presence of God in the world than preaching; (3) or finally because Bonhoeffer does not feel the time is ripe for a language

⁶¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, Trans. Bernard Noble (New York: Harper and Row, 41.

⁶² Fant, *Worldly Preaching*, 76.

⁶³ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 370.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 286.

⁶⁵ Fant *Worldly Preaching*, 94.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 95.

purged of its religious and pious overtones.⁶⁷ Certainly the first two could not be what Bonhoeffer wished to convey since they would be the antithesis of his view of being involved in the world. Therefore, the third explanation seems more appropriate.

We have seen, then, Bonhoeffer is more concerned with eradicating the religious overtones which have encumbered the Church and even the interpretation of the Gospel. But does he say anything about actual exegesis? In *Christ the Center* he states:

In the exegesis of Scripture we find ourselves on very uncertain ground. So we may never stick to the point, but must move over the whole of the Bible, from one place to another, just as a man can only cross a river covered in ice floes if he does not remain standing on one particular floe but jumps from one to another.⁶⁸

It is somewhat uncertain exactly what Bonhoeffer means here, but clearly Bonhoeffer did not see exegesis as the only key for unlocking the true meaning of Scripture. Many times in his writings, Bonhoeffer will quote a verse and not give any interpretation of it. He comments that Jesus' sayings can only be interpreted by Jesus himself.⁶⁹ Perhaps Marty's observation has some truth to it:

Bonhoeffer imposed his own views on Scripture; he seemed impatient with historical research; after he gained his credentials as a boring writer of academic dissertations, he deserted arcane theology; he was an intuitive if not the most profound or seminal systematic thinker.⁷⁰

Whether or not he imposed his views on Scripture could be a matter of debate. However, it is a fact that he was not enthused with the historical-critical method. He constantly speaks against any demythologizing:

It is neither possible nor right for us to try to get behind the Word of Scripture to the events as they actually occurred. Rather, the whole of Scriptures summons us to follow Jesus. We must not do violence to the

⁶⁷ Dumas, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian of Reality*, 212.

⁶⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, Trans. John Bowden (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 76.

⁶⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Neville H. Smith (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1978), 69.

⁷⁰ *nweal*, 93 (October 2, 1970): 27-8.

Scriptures by interpreting them in terms of an abstract principle, even if that principle be a doctrine of grace.⁷¹

Perhaps a key to understanding Bonhoeffer's hermeneutical system is seeing his understanding of Scripture as Christocentric. Harrelson writes:

The christocentric interpretation of the Old Testament appears in Bonhoeffer's sermons as well, In the lecture on re-presentation he goes farther and offers a defense of the allegorical interpretation of Scripture, under certain limitations. Explicit logical and grammatical meanings of a word or verse may not exhaust its meaning. The word may contain other perspectives of meaning also. When symbolic or allegorical meanings are not found, however, they must point to Christ alone, and they must hold fast to the text itself.⁷²

Perhaps all that can be said with certainty is that Bonhoeffer considered Scripture to be the Word of God. He does not explain intricate details or theories of inspiration. The message is centered in Christ. Paul Ballard claims: "All Bonhoeffer's thought is fundamentally Christological."⁷³ Bonhoeffer writes: "We want to meet Christ in his Word. We go to the text curious to hear what he wants us to know and give us through his word."⁷⁴ If Bonhoeffer was not explicit concerning hermeneutics and exegesis, he was certain of the effects of the Word: "It (Word) does only one thing: it calls us to faith and obedience to the truth once recognized in Jesus Christ."⁷⁵

6. The Disparate Character of the Works of Bultmann and Bonhoeffer – and the Concentration of the Relation of Hermeneutics to Homiletics

It was alluded to previously that Bonhoeffer's works are somewhat fragmentary; thus, in studying Bonhoeffer one can have the impression

⁷¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R.H. Fuller (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 84.

⁷² Walter Harrelson, "Bonhoeffer and the Bible," in *The Place of Bonhoeffer*, ed. Martin Marty (New York: Association Press, 1964), 118.

⁷³ Paul Ballard, "Worship in a Secular World: Bonhoeffer's Secret Discipline," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 68 (Autumn 1975): 28.

⁷⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Way to Freedom*, ed. E.H. Robertson, trans. E.H. Robertson and John Bowden (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 58.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 177.

that he is piecing his thoughts together. Phillips cogently states concerning this problem:

A look at the production of Bonhoeffer's eighteen years as a theologian reveals the unsystematic character of his thinking. The biographical aspects of his career often affected his theological work, and it is a basic assumption on the part of many of his interpreters that the history of the time through which and in which Bonhoeffer lived is an important factor to be considered in the assessment of his thought.⁷⁶

However, through his works one is able to come to some definite conclusions concerning the hermeneutical system of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Unlike Bultmann, Bonhoeffer was not a scientific exegete. He was not concerned with obtaining the "kernel" of the message by the process of demythologization. Why was this? Because to Bonhoeffer demythologization had not gone far enough. According to him, those elements which Bultmann terms mythology, i. e. resurrection, etc., are to be understood literally. However, Bonhoeffer wishes to rid Christianity of religion and in a sense this relates to Bultmann's reductionism. "But for Bonhoeffer it is not the mythological concepts that are problematic, but the 'religious' ones."⁷⁷

Phillips states an interesting comment about the method and procedure of Bonhoeffer:

Scientific exegesis with the aim of disclosing the original form of a text or uncovering the historical setting of a particular passage was just not Bonhoeffer's concern. His question, by passing textual criticism (and leaving for us the problem of the relationship between this and what he wished to do), was how to hear and obey the Word of God. He feared losing sight of this problem in textual and critical theorizing. . . . His meditation upon and obedience to the Word of scripture was, therefore, not a side issue in Bonhoeffer's theology, but close to its center.⁷⁸

Bonhoeffer, even though a protégé of professors who espoused the historical-critical method of interpretation, did not believe that this method to be of vital importance for a procedure of scriptural interpretation.

From the very beginning of his interest in the problem of Scriptural interpretation, he was intensely involved with the question of how one

⁷⁶ John A. Phillips, *Christ for Us in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1967), 19-20.

⁷⁷ Godsey, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 253.

⁷⁸ Phillips, *Christ for Us in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 85.

relates oneself to scripture; how scripture became actual and concrete in life. “Scientific” exegetical thinking should grow from this basis, not vice versa. His thoughts on scripture were thus taken up along with his meditations on questions concerning ethics and proclamation.⁷⁹

One almost obtains the impression that for Bonhoeffer the Word could not be meaningful through the critical method.

Bonhoeffer now speaks of the Bible as, in the first place, the devotional center of the Christian life of faith. At the same time, he clearly recognizes that the two approaches to the Scriptures, a “devotional” and a “theological” approach, cannot finally be allowed. Critical work had become meaningless for his devotional life—“breaking the ground” of the Bible was now utterly beside the point. He therefore found it necessary to admit his willingness to suspend certain critical reservations in order to confront a Bible whose every part is theologically trustworthy and whose integrity and unity is unquestioned.⁸⁰

While Bonhoeffer accepted Scripture as the Word of God, it is doubtful if he held to what contemporary evangelical theologians term “verbal-plenary inspiration,” meaning that God gave human agents the very words of the Bible. Bonhoeffer claims concerning Genesis 1:6-10: “The idea of verbal inspiration will not do. The writer of the first chapter of Genesis is behaving in a very human way.”⁸¹ Bonhoeffer seemingly is more interested in ridding the Christian world of troublesome concepts than performing exacting exegesis and word studies upon the Scriptures. According to Dumas, Bultmann operates within the structure of transcendental Kantianism; thus, there is a lack of objectivizing the Old Testament. However, Bonhoeffer operates within an incarnational Hegelianism which emphasizes the value of the Old Testament.⁸² But it seems that Bonhoeffer in regard to obtaining the original understanding of Scripture has more in common with Barth than with Bultmann. Both Barth and Bonhoeffer would not capitulate the mythological world or the language of the Bible.⁸³ Why would Bonhoeffer not accept Bultmann’s method?

⁷⁹ Ibid., 89.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 92.

⁸¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, trans. John C. Fletcher (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1978), 29.

⁸² Dumas, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian of Reality*, 246-47.

⁸³ Phillips, *Christ for Us in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 220.

Demythologization, while it is part of the process of differentiation and assessment, has failed fully to reflect the concern of a non-religious interpretation not only because it frequently confuses interpretation with substitution, but also to the extent to which it has found comfort in the religious apriori of existentialism.⁸⁴

Two interpreters of Bonhoeffer, Ronald Gregor Smith and Gerhard Ebeling, contend that Bonhoeffer is closer to Bultmann than any other contemporary theologian.⁸⁵ Their similarities and contrasts have already been discussed. Possibly the most striking comparison between the two is their view of Scripture. Like Bultmann, Bonhoeffer does not mean that the Bible is a consistent whole, historically or theologically. There are some portions of Scripture which have “degrees of significance.”⁸⁶ This premise seemingly is peculiar to both Bultmann and Bonhoeffer.

Both also place a heavy emphasis upon the individual interpreter. Bonhoeffer claims: “Thus the interpreter makes the claim to be able to distinguish the Word of God and the word of man in Holy Scripture. He himself knows where is the Word of God and where is the word of man. So, for example, the theology of Paul is the word of man, the so-called religion of Jesus is divine.”⁸⁷

He claims:

The doctrine of sin and justification are temporal and past, the struggle for the good and pure is eternal . . . With this the key to the exposition of the Scripture is put into our hand. Just as in secular writing we can distinguish the genuine words of the author from the spurious additions, so now in the Bible we can distinguish the Word of God from the word of man and can separate the one from the other.⁸⁸

7. Hermeneutics and Homiletics

What is preaching for Bonhoeffer and upon what is it based? These and similar questions will be explored. Bethge writes of Bonhoeffer:

Bonhoeffer loved to preach. When a relative discovered that she might have only months to live, he wrote, “What would I do if I learned that in

⁸⁴ Ibid., 220

⁸⁵ Woelfel, *Bonhoeffer's Theology*, 113.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 108.

⁸⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, ed. E. H. Roberston (New York: William Collins Sons & Co., 1977), 308-9.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 309.