Rudolf Bultmann's programme of demythologising and the resurrection narratives in John

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ABSTRACT
In this essay the outcome of Bultmann's literary and tradition/redaction criticism, as well as the demythologising and existential interpretation of the resurrection narratives in John, is explored. The present writer generally agrees with Bultmann's views which can be summed up as follows: The intention of John was not to present a verifying historical account of the resurrection as a returning of Jesus to this life. As far as this may have been the case, it is of relative value and was only in keeping with existing traditions which typically tried to establish the resurrection historically as a verifying miracle, albeit in vain. Such attempts to demonstrate the resurrection as a historical and physical event were only meant to accentuate the fact that Jesus gained victory over death through his cross, and that his resurrection was nothing more than his return as victor in the faith that overcame the offensiveness of the cross. Seen in this light, the resurrection of Jesus was nothing more than the expression of the significance of the cross.

1 THE PROBLEM
Before embarking on the specific theme of this investigation it seems appropriate to refresh our memories with regard to Bultmann's views on myth and mythology in the New Testament, as the starting point for his programme of demythologising. Everyone who has already acquainted himself with Bultmann's programme of demythologising the New Testament knows that this programme derives from what has been identified by him as a problem in the New Testament. Such a person also knows that this problem has been formulated by Bultmann in a dual manner as "Das mythische Weltbild und das mythische heilsgeschehen im Neuen Testament" and "Die Unmöglicheit der Repristinierung des mythischen Weltbildes" (Bultmann 1948:15-16).

2 WHAT IS "MYTH" ACCORDING TO BULTMANN?
Again, before hearing Bultmann on this problem one should recall what he has to say regarding myth and mythology. He states in this regard: "Ich ver-
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According to this approach, which is typified by him as the "science of religions" approach, myth is seen as a report of an event in which supernatural, superhuman powers or persons operate. This being the case, "mythisches denken" should be seen as "Gegenbegriff" to scientific thinking because in scientific thinking there is no room for the activities of supernatural powers, be they activities setting in motion events of nature, or activities interrupting such events (Bultmann 1952:180). Scientific thinking does not need the "hypothesis God" and it repudiates the concept of miracles interrupting the causal continuity of world events (Bultmann 1965b:128).

Mythical thinking, on the contrary, attributes certain phenomena and events to supernatural or divine powers, whether they are seen as dynamistic or animistic, or as personal spirits or deities, or not. Certain phenomena and events are thus exempted from the familiar, discernible and controllable entities and events within the world. In addition to this, the "otherworldly" is spoken about as if worldly. The myth thus "... redet vom Unweltlichen weltlich, von den Göttern menschlich" (Bultmann 1948:23). The only difference is that the gods are seen as much more powerful than human beings and that their activities are seen as unpredictable and capable of interrupting the natural course of world events (Bultmann 1952:184). "Man kann sagen, Mythen geben der transzendenten Wirklichkeit eine immanente weltliche Objektivität. Der Mythe objektiviert das Jenseitige zum Diesseitigen" (Bultmann 1965a:146). In so doing, the otherworldly is objectified "... zum Verfügbaren, was sich darin zeigt, dass der Kultus mehr und mehr zu einer das Verhalten der Gottheit beeinflussenden, ihren Zorn abwendenden, ihre Gunst gewinnenden Handlung wird" (Bultmann 1952:184). This way of thinking is totally different from the scientific approach, which is based on the consideration of cause and effect. Scientific thinking requires a firm premise for every statement, while a lack of coherence is characteristic of mythical stories. Mythical thinking contemplates the world and world events as "open" — open to the intervention of otherworldly powers. Science, on the contrary, considers the world and world events as "closed", and only open in so far as knowledge about the world and world events is never conclusive.

It is common knowledge that Bultmann was widely criticised for his definition of myth. It has been argued that he operated on the basis of too broad a definition of what should be understood by "myth" or "mythological". His contention that myth is virtually prescientific, unhistorical, unreal, nonfactual and incompatible with the modern scientific worldview, is considered as too simplistic. It has been pointed out that not only are there different definitions of myth and mythology, but one should also distinguish between myths of different kinds (Kerygma und Mythos series; Dunn 1977:285ff). In his reaction to these criticisms Bultmann replied that he did not consider the issue of prime importance, and that if anyone wanted to interpret myth as
something different from his concept, such a person was free to do so. He himself, however, was of the opinion that an alternative definition would not have altered the situation or softened the problem. He consequently stated: "Vielmehr scheint mir die Diskussion dieser Frage von dem wegzuführen, um was es eigentlich beim Problem der Entmythologisierung geht" (Bultmann 1952:180).

3 MYTH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT
Looking at the New Testament in terms of this definition of myth, Bultmann has no doubt that the worldview of the New Testament is mythical. The world is seen as divided into three storeys: heaven, earth and the underworld. Heaven is the abode of God and the heavenly beings, the angels; the underworld is hell, the seat of misery where the devil has his abode. But even the earth is not seen as the locus of natural, everyday events. It is the stage on which supernatural powers are at work: God and his angels, Satan and his demons. These powers intervene in the natural course of events as well as in the thought, will and actions of man. Miracles occur frequently. Man has no power over himself; demons can possess him and Satan can instil evil thoughts in him. But God can also direct man's thoughts and will, can let him experience heavenly visions, can let him hear his demanding or comforting word and grant him the supernatural power of his Spirit. History, too, does not follow a steady course according to its natural laws, but receives its course and direction from supernatural powers. This aion is under the power of Satan, sin and death and is on its way to an imminent end, an end which will occur as a cosmic catastrophe. Imminent are the woes of the endtime, the advent of the heavenly judge, the resurrection of the dead and the judgement to life or to perdition (Bultmann 1948:15).

As can be expected, the manner in which the salvific events in the New Testament are described entirely corresponds with this mythical worldview. In mythological language it is announced: the endtime has come; when the time had been fulfilled God sent his Son. This pre-existent Godfigure appeared as man on earth; his death on the cross, a death he experienced like a sinner, brought about expiation for the sins of men. His resurrection is the inauguration of the cosmic catastrophe through which death, brought into the world by Adam, will be destroyed; the demonic earthly powers have lost their power. The risen Christ has been exalted to the right hand of God in heaven and made Lord and King. He will return on the clouds of heaven to complete his salvific work. The resurrection of the dead and judgement will then take place; then sin, death and all misery will be destroyed. All of this will happen soon, so soon that someone like Paul expects it to happen during his lifetime (Bultmann 1948:15).
3.1 The impossibility of maintaining this worldview in modern times

To maintain this mythical worldview is, according to Bultmann, at the same time senseless and impossible. It is senseless to maintain because it is not Christian but taken over from Jewish apocalyptic and the gnostic redeemer myth. It is therefore a worldview of a time gone by and not yet formed by scientific thought (Bultmann 1948:17,28). It is impossible to maintain because one cannot expect people today to accept it. No one can make a worldview his own simply by decision. Worldview is already a fact of the historical situation in which one finds oneself. Likewise, in modern thought the criticism of the New Testament worldview is a fact. No one can earnestly subscribe to this worldview. No mature, present-day human being imagines God in a heaven above. Heaven in this sense of the word no longer exists.

Für den Menschen von heute sind das mythologische Weltbild, die Vorstellung vom Ende, vom Erlöser und der Erlösung vergangen und erledigt (Bultmann 1965a:145).

Erledigt sind damit die Geschichten von der Himmel- und Höllenfahrt Christi; erledigt ist die Erwartung des mit den Wolken des Himmels kommenden "Menschensohnes" und des Entraftfahrungs der Glaubigen in die Luft, ihm entgegen (1 Thess 4, 15 ff) (Bultmann 1948:18).

This also pertains to the belief in spirits and demons, miracles and mythical eschatology. Can we, asks Bultmann, in the light of this modern worldview expect from modern man to commit a sacrificium intellectus, accepting something as true simply because it is written in the Bible? Modern man, who has outgrown mythical thinking, sees himself as an unity and attributes his feelings, thought and will to himself and no longer to the intervention of demonic or divine powers. For this very reason he is aware of his responsibility to himself and his freedom. In his relationship with God he can only see himself as a person who is addressed by God in his existence as a person. Further, he can only perceive God's actions in so far as he experiences them existentially. A doctrine of satisfaction which describes God's actions as cultic or judicial, a Christ event which cannot be understood as impinging on his personal existence is unacceptable to him. It is impossible for modern man to make use of modern technology and at the same time believe in the spirit - and the miraculous world of the New Testament. What the New Testament has to say about the Holy Spirit and the sacraments is strange and incomprehensible to him. Further, he cannot imagine death as punishment for sins. Death to him is a simple, inevitable event in nature. He knows guilt only as something for which he himself is responsible and cannot imagine that his ancestors were responsible for his damnation. Likewise, he cannot understand why Christ who was guiltless had to die vicariously for him.

3.2 The necessity of demythologising
In the light of all this it is obvious, says Bultmann, that something should be done if we are still of the opinion that the New Testament has something to say to modern man. What should we do then? Should we just eliminate the mythical and concentrate, say, on the ethical? No, continues Bultmann (1965a:146; 1965b:133), the myth should rather be interpreted according to its intention. The intention of the myth, aetiological myths excluded, is not to establish an objective worldview. It is rather to give expression to the way in which man understands himself in the world. For this reason the myth does not want to be interpreted cosmologically, but anthropologically, or even better, existentially (Bultmann 1948:23). Myth in the New Testament, therefore, should not be interpreted according to the way in which it represents reality. Its sense doesn’t lie in its objectivistic thinking but in the Existenzverständnis which is expressed in its depiction of reality (Bultmann 1948:24,28; 1952:183). Since, however, this Existenzverständnis is expressed inadequately by the myth’s objectivistic thinking and language and is thus concealed, demythologising as a hermeneutic method is indispensable as well as imperative.

3.3 What does demythologising aim at?
The aim of demythologising is, in a nutshell, to bring to expression the real intention of the myth. This intention is to speak about the existence of man as founded on and confined by an extraterrestrial power, a power which is not manifest to objectivistic thinking. Furthermore, demythologising has both a negative and a positive side, that is, it operates negatively as well as positively.

Negativ ist die Entmythologisierung daher Kritik am Weltbild des Mythos, sofern dieses die eigentliche Intention des Mythos verbirgt. Positiv ist die Entmythologisierung existentielle Interpretation indem sie die Intention des Mythos deutlich machen will, eben seine Absicht, von der Existenz des Menschen zu reden (Bultmann 1952:184).

It is important to take note, however, that although this programme of demythologising comprises both negative and positive aspects, the emphasis is on the positive. It is also important to take note that Bultmann’s "existentielle Interpretation" comprises much more than a subdivision of his theol-
On the contrary, his theology in its entirety is nothing other than "existential Interpretation" (and rightly so Schmithals 1966:271f; Hübner 1985:645). The reason for this is that he has no doubt in his mind that the New Testament itself requires such an interpretation. It is well known in this regard that Bultmann draws a sharp distinction between the terms existential and existentiell. Although, according to him, both terms refer to existence, each one refers to existence in a different respect. In the first instance the reference is to the analysis of the structure and possibilities of human existence, while in the second it is to the actual decisions made by man from the possibilities available to him for existing in the concreteness of his Dasein. Man exists, but he doesn't exist existential, he exists existentiell.

Although Bultmann was criticised by several scholars to the extent that this distinction was not clear and that it could not be maintained, he nevertheless held on to it. However, what was important to him was not so much the term used, but the method. He therefore states:

Natürlich kommt es auf den Terminus "existential" nicht an; wer will oder kann, mag einen bessern finden. Es sollte nur deutlich sein, dass mit der existenzielten Interpretation eine Methode der Auslegung, eine die Auslegung leitende Fragenstellung, gemeint ist; und es sollte nicht ständig die "existentiale" Interpretation mit einer existentiellen verwechselt werden (Bultmann 1952:184 n1).

How does the New Testament see man, existentially speaking? According to Bultmann it does not view man differently from the way philosophy does. But how does philosophy see man? It sees man as historically existing in a state of anxiety about himself due to the fears that plague him. It sees man as constantly finding himself in a situation of having to make a decision at a moment between the past and the future. Man is confronted with the question as to whether he is going to lose himself in the world of tangible things as well as with the question as to whether he will gain his Eigentlichkeit (his real life) in abandoning all security and in being unconditionally free for the future. "Ist nicht so auch im Neuen Testament der Mensch verstanden?", asks Bultmann (1948:35).

It is to man in this situation that the New Testament addresses itself, man who has lost the possibility for and the true knowledge of Eigentlichkeit. The purpose of the New Testament is then to bring man to a proper selfknowledge in the situation in which he finds himself, that is to exist in Eigentlichkeit.

What this exactly boils down to can be illustrated by what Bultmann has to say about the significance of the cross. True to its mythical worldview the New Testament understands the cross as a mythical event through which the Son of God by means of his vicarious sacrifice expiates the sin of the world and frees man from death. But, says Bultmann: "Diese mythologische Inter-
pretation, in der sich Opfervorstellungen und eine juristische Satisfaktions-
theorie mischen, ist für uns nicht nachvollziehbar" (1948:45). Moreover, the
myth of the cross doesn't say what it should within the understanding of the

What, then, does it wish to say and how should it be interpreted? It wants
to say that when God had Christ crucified, he erected the cross for us. To
believe in the cross of Christ does not mean that we have to fix our eyes on a
mythical event which occurred outside ourselves and our world as an object-
ively perceptible event regarded by God as being to our benefit. No, to
believe in the cross "... heisst, das Kreuz Christi als das eigene übernehmen,
heisst, sich mit Christus kreuzigen lassen" [italics mine] (Bultmann 1948:46).

The cross is therefore not an isolated event which happened to Christ as a
mythical person, although it has in its significance a cosmic dimension. Its
decisive, history-changing significance comes to expression in the fact that it
is an eschatological event. It is therefore not an event of the past upon which
one looks back, but an event which is ever present. It is present "... im
konkreten Lebensvollzug der Glaubenden "...", that is when those who believe
in Christ have put to death their human nature with all its passions and
desires (Gl 5:24) (Bultmann 1948:46).

4 THE RESURRECTION NARRATIVES IN JOHN: THE QUESTION
AS TO THEIR UNITY AND INTENTION
It should be pointed out that since Bultmann regards chapter 21 as "Nach-
trag" and not part of the Gospel as such, he deals only with 20:1-29 as far as
the resurrection narratives are concerned. In 20:1-29 he furthermore distin-
guishes three different narratives, namely verses 1-18; 19-23; 24-29. Meth-
odologically his approach is, as can be expected, literary as well as tradi-
tion/redaction critical (see Bultmann 1968:528-540).

4.1 The Easter morning (20:1-18)

4.1.1 Literary criticism
As also observed by others before and after him, Bultmann's literary criticism
is based on the observation that there are a number of tensions in this narra-
tive: They are the following: Mary visits the tomb alone (1) but then says:
"we' don't know" (2). The description of the disciples' movement to the tomb
seems unnatural: they go to the tomb and arrive there (3) and only then it is
mentioned that they have run there.

The disciples see the linen wrappings but nothing else (5-7); Mary sees
the angels but not the linen wrappings (12). The disciples believe as they see
the empty tomb (8); in Mary's case it creates questions of desperation (2, 13,
15). According to verse 8 the beloved disciple believed; according to 9 neither
understood the scripture. The faith of the beloved disciple has no influence
on Mary or on the continuing Easter events. Where has Mary been between
2 and 11? The angles give Mary no answer and seem redundant. The angels and Jesus strikingly ask the same question of Mary (13, 15). The appearances of the angels and of Jesus compete with each other. Unlike Mark 16:5-8, it is not the angels that give the command to Mary, but Jesus. The command to Mary is weakened by the fact that at that time the disciples (or at least one of them) already believed in the resurrection. Mary turns twice to Jesus (14, 16). Jesus' admonition not to hold on to him is inexplicable since no mention is made of such an attempt from her side. The combination of direct and indirect speech in 18 is strange.

4.1.2 Tradition/redaction criticism
On the basis of his source theory with regard to the Gospel of John, Bultmann ascribes these tensions to the fact that the narrative was composed of materials taken and edited by the evangelist from the passion-source, his own creations as well as additions by a redactor. The composition of this narrative is therefore to be explained as follows: the evangelist did not originally find the two events in a combined form. He found the Mary history in the source, and this history corresponds with the narrative in Mark 16:5-7par, except that he replaced the end of this narrative with the events of 14-18. The fact that only Mary is mentioned indicates that the Synoptics didn't serve as source. What was taken from the source is 1 and 11-13. Verse 2 is a redactional creation of the evangelist in order to make possible the narrative of 3-8 and 10, which is also in its entirety the creation of the evangelist. Verse 9 is a glossary to be attributed to church redaction. Because of the use of διὰ it is un-Johannine and reminds one rather of Synoptic terminology or church belief. However, also in verse 3ff motifs from the Mary history have been incorporated. Although this accurate description initially had the apologetic purpose of stifling the idea that the disciples stole the body, the evangelist probably only took it over for reasons of illustration.

4.1.3 The author's intention with the composition of this narrative
The significance and meaning of the disciple narrative lies in the relationship between the two disciples: they are involved in a race against each other in which everyone in turn has a specific advantage. Peter represents Jewish Christianity and the beloved disciple (who is a construction of the evangelist) non-Jewish Christianity. The outcome of their race symbolizes the following: the first believers comprised Jewish Christians; only after them came the non-Jewish Christians. But this implies no priority. Essentially, both are equally close to the risen Jesus. As a matter of fact the non-Jew was more willing to believe than the Jew: the beloved disciple ran faster than Peter.

The intention of the narration of the Mary history should be sought in the conclusion provided by the evangelist himself, namely verses 14-18. It is indicated in the first place that one does not gain insight into who Jesus is before one has been struck by his word. Mary thinks he is the gardener until he
addresses her. Furthermore, by μὴ μου ἐπτού expression is given to the fact that Jesus' resurrected being is not a return to a worldly being, but the being of the one ascended to the Father. With μὴ μου ἐπτού, criticism is actually levelled against the Easter histories in general. The evangelist uses it to intimate that the visible appearance of Jesus is not the foundation of the Easter faith. The miracle of the worldly appearance of the resurrected is regarded as one of the *semeia* (cf 20:30) and is therefore only of relative value. It is of symbolic significance only.

4.2 The resurrected before the disciples (20:19-23)

4.2.1 Literary criticism
Apart from verse 19 being a redactional link, this narrative forms a unit but it shows no coherence with the preceding or following narrative. Mary's message (20:18) is not recalled, and neither is the fact that the two disciples had already seen the empty tomb (20:3-10). The reader also doesn't expect another Easter narrative after 22f, since no impression is given that one of the disciples was missing at this appearance.

4.2.2 Tradition/redaction criticism
This narrative is a variation of Matthew 28:16-20 and Luke 24:36-49 in which a report is given in the usual legendary manner about the miracle of Jesus' resurrection as well as the demonstrative realisation of himself. The command to the disciples in 23 differs markedly from the way in which the evangelist has spoken of Jesus' commands to his disciples in 15:18-16:11. Here nothing is heard of the μαρτυρεῖν of the disciples but of their ἐκθέμασιν and καταλαβεῖν of sins. The greater part of this tradition has been taken by the evangelist from the source but he has also edited it. He has especially added 21f as a symbolic representation of the fulfilment of the promise of 14:18. Herewith it is indicated that Easter and Pentecost coincide. Verse 23 undoubtedly also comes from the source and reminds one of Luke 24:47 where the forgiving of sins is mentioned as a component of the kerygma. The retention of 20 from the source is foreign to the evangelist. He, however, has only retained it because of the Thomas history which follows, and it probably also emphasises the fact that the resurrected and the crucified are one and the same person.

4.2.3 The author's intention with this narrative
The author's intention is to convey symbolically the fact that the promise of the coming of Jesus according to 14:18ff has been fulfilled for the disciples. The event described by the evangelist is, however, not the fulfilment itself, because the words ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ in 14:20 do not refer to a historically fixed day but to the eschatological day which dawns every day for the believer who remains faithful and overcomes the offensiveness (of the cross). At the
same time this narrative wants one to understand that whenever one’s eyes open to what has already been given to you, that is peace (14:27), the Easter moment has dawned. And this means joy to you in the fullest sense of the word (ἐχάριστα — 20).

4.3 The doubting Thomas (20:24-29)

4.3.1 Literary criticism
The narrative appears to be a unit. No tension is noticeable except that this narrative presupposes the previous one (19-23) while the reverse is not true.

4.3.2 Tradition/redaction criticism
This narrative has no Synoptic parallels, although the motive of doubt is not foreign to the Synoptics (Mt 28:17; Lk 24:11,21ff,37f,41), and in Luke 24:39-41 as well, the physical demonstration of the resurrected was needed to end the disciples’ doubt. It is not impossible that this narrative formed part of the source. It must, however, have been a secondary addition to the source, since 19-23 does not imply 24-29, although the latter presupposes the former. This narrative also has been edited by the evangelist in that he added 25-27 looking back to Jesus’ pierced side referred to in 19:34. Thomas’ confession (28) is probably the evangelist’s own formulation but Jesus’ last word (29) is certainly so. That a large part of the narrative has been taken from the source is confirmed by the fact that nowhere else in the Gospel is mention made of the twelve (24).

4.3.3 The author’s intention with this narrative
The author’s intention is not to point out Thomas’ unbelief or to declare happy those later believers who will not be eyewitnesses. As is the case with the Mary history this narrative also levels criticism against the value attached to the Easter events: they can only have relative value. They are to be considered not events one would imagine oneself, nor substitutes for one’s own experience, so as to let the experience of others be one’s guarantee of the reality of the resurrection of Jesus. It should rather be seen as a proclaiming word in which the narrated events became symbolic images of the communion that exists between the resurrected and those who belong to him. It is he who has been exalted that appears to the disciples. For this reason there is no ascension afterwards.

5 JOHN’S ACCOUNT OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS DEMYTHOLOGISED
Bultmann’s interpretation of John’s account of Jesus’ resurrection, not only through the resurrection narratives but elsewhere in the Gospel as well, can now be summed up as follows:
* Since John interprets Jesus' death on the cross as at the same time as his exaltation and glorification, he does not regard the resurrection as an event of particular importance.
* He therefore does not regard the resurrection as the annulment of death's victory over Jesus.
* It is furthermore not through his resurrection that Jesus became lord of the cosmic and demonic powers. This he had already been, prior to his resurrection.
* The resurrection is not a cosmic event which accomplished something new that had not already been accomplished by Jesus' word. It was rather the demonstration of the victory already gained by Jesus (16:33).
* One should not read more into the Easter histories than they were, that is signs, figures or professions of the Easter faith.
* From 20:30 also we can assume that Jesus' appearances were seen as signs and that they were essentially dispensable.
* In the Mary history as in the Thomas history there is a criticism of the overrating of the significance of the Easter histories. They can have only relative value.
* Resurrection, Pentecost and parousia are in John's view one event - not a cosmic or mythical event, but the decisive event of the return of the from-the-earth-separated Jesus in the experience of faith.
* What Mary received as a command was not to go and report that Jesus had risen, but that he had ascended. The obvious assumption from this is that his resurrection was not a return to this life.
* The genuine Easter faith is therefore the faith that believes that Jesus ascended, the faith that with understanding overcomes the offensiveness of the cross.
* Easter faith is not faith in a palpable, innerworldly demonstration of the resurrected.
* Easter, Pentecost and parousia are indeed not an external but the internal event of the victory gained by Jesus, in that faith came into being in man as a result of the victory gained over the offensiveness of the cross.
* The victory gained by Jesus is the fact that the faith that professes him to be the revelation of God, now exists.
* As is the parousia, so too is the Easter event "... in die stets mögliche und notwendige Erfahrung des Glaubenden verlegt" (Bultmann 1968b:448).

6 BULTMANN'S DEMYTHOLOGISING AND EXISTENTIAL INTERPRETATION OF JESUS' RESURRECTION IN GENERAL
From this interpretation of the significance and intention of the resurrection narratives in John it is abundantly clear that in Bultmann's view the intention was not to present a verifying historical account of the resurrection as a return of Jesus to this life. As far as this may have been the case, it is of rela-
tive value and was only in accord with existing traditions which in a typical mythical way tried to verify the resurrection historically, albeit in vain. Such an attempt to demonstrate the resurrection as a historical and physical event was only meant to accentuate the fact that Jesus gained victory over death through his cross and that his resurrection was nothing more than his return as victor in the faith that overcame the offensiveness of the cross.

Since much of what Bultmann has to say about the resurrection of Jesus in general is based on his interpretation of the resurrection in John, it seems worthwhile to hear him more extensively on this subject. Starting with the question as to whether Jesus' resurrection was not simply a mythical event, he replies with the following statement: "Ein historisches Ereignis, das in seiner Bedeutsamkeit zu verstehen wäre, ist sie ja jedenfalls nicht" (Bultmann 1948:47). What could it then be? According to Bultmann it could be nothing more than the expression of the significance of the cross (1948:47). This means that what the resurrection wanted to say, was that Jesus' death on the cross should not be seen as a human death, but as God's salvific judgement of the world, the judgement that strips death of its power. The cross and the resurrection as cosmic events are therefore a unit. The resurrection is not an event which followed death as an annulment of death. It is therefore not a fact that Christ's death was a descent into death and his resurrection the annihilation of death. In this instance the resurrection should have been seen as a verifying miracle. This cannot be since the death of the Son of God was in itself already the victory over the power of death. His death has been, as the Gospel of John sees it, already his glorification: his elevation on the cross is at the same time his exaltation in glory (Jn 3:14). "Dann kann aber die Auferstehung nicht ein beglaubigendes Mirakel sein, dessen feststellbare sicherheit den Fragenden davon überzeugen könnte, dass das Kreuz wirklich die ihm zugeschriebene kosmisch-eschatologische Bedeutung hat" (Bultmann 1948:48). That the resurrection of Christ has in some instances in the New Testament been so understood (Ac 17:31; and especially Lk 24:39-43) cannot, according to Bultmann, be denied. These traditions, however, were from a later period and were not yet known to Paul. Even in the one case when Paul made use of such a tradition (1 Cor 15:3-8) his intention was not to make the resurrection credible as an objective historical fact. His sole intention was to let his readers know that just as the earliest community of believers did, he also preached Jesus as the resurrected. The witnesses Paul was referring to were witnesses of the Pauline gospel and not of the factuality of the resurrection (Bultmann 1948:48).

The resurrection of Jesus can for two reasons not be a verifying miracle: firstly because as a mythical event - the return of the deceased to life in this world - it is incredible; secondly because not one of the many witnesses could ascertain or prove its historical factuality. The resurrection is itself an object of faith and one cannot prove one faith (faith in the salvific significance of the cross) by another (faith in the resurrection). In any case, the truth of the
The resurrection of Christ cannot be recognised prior to faith by which the resurrected is acknowledged as Lord. It can therefore not be proven or explained as an objective established fact in which one can believe (Bultmann 1968a:305). It is an object of faith because it comprises much more than the return of a deceased to this life, since it is an eschatological event. As an eschatological event it has destroyed death and made possible life and imperishability (Bultmann 1948:49).

The resurrection of Christ, therefore, is no mythical event which can make credible the significance of the cross, for it is believed in, as in the significance of the cross. "Ja, der Auferstehungsglaube ist nichts anderes als der Glaube an das Kreuz als Heilseignis, an das Kreuz als Kreuz Christi" (Bultmann 1948:50). And Christ, the crucified and resurrected, meets us in the word of proclamation, nowhere else. Indeed faith in this word of proclamation is the true Easter faith. We cannot enquire into the past, behind the historical source of the proclamation as if so doing could prove the legitimacy of the proclamation. This would mean that we want to substantiate faith in God's word by means of historical enquiry. The word of proclamation comes to us as God's word in respect of which we may not ask the question of legitimacy, but which asks from us whether we are willing to believe in it or not. By appealing to us to believe in the death and resurrection of Christ as an eschatological event, the proclamation opens up to us the possibility of understanding ourselves.

The understanding faith in the word of the proclamation is the genuine Easter faith; it is the belief that the proclaiming word is the legitimate word of God. The Easter event in so far as it can be mentioned as a historical event alongside the cross, is nothing more than the origin of faith in the resurrected, the faith in which the proclamation has its origin. "Das Osterseignis als Auferstehung Christi ist kein historisches Ereignis; als historisches Ereignis ist nur der Osterglaube der ersten Jünger fassbar" (Bultmann 1948:51). How precisely this Easter faith originated amongst the disciples, has been eclipsed by legends and is of no real importance (Bultmann 1968a:47). According to 1 Corinthians 15:5-8 the resurrection of Christ was at the same time his exaltation. Only later was his resurrection depicted as a temporary return to life on earth and from this has originated the tradition of the ascension (Bultmann 1968a:48). The Easter faith of the first followers of Jesus is, however, not a fact on the basis of which we can believe, for it is itself part of the eschatological events which are the object of faith (Bultmann 1948:51; 1968a:305). In other words the word of proclamation which originated in the Easter event is itself part of the eschatological salvific events. It is this word of reconciliation that comes together with the cross and as a salvific event, makes it comprehensible in that it asks man whether he would consider himself as co-crucified and co-resurrected. Through the sounding of the word the cross and resurrection become present, the eschatological 'now' takes place and resurrection life is brought about in the
believer. "Im gepredigten Wort und nur in ihm begegnet der Auferstandene" (Bultmann 1948:51). "Hört er (the believer) es als zu ihm gesprochene, ihm den Tod und dadurch das Leben zusprechende Wort, so glaubt er an den Auferstandenem" (Bultmann 1968a:306).

More than once criticism has been levelled against Bultmann, it being claimed that his interpretation of the kerygma implies that Jesus arose in the kerygma. This has been fully conceded by Bultmann, provided that it is understood properly, that is that the kerygma is itself an eschatological event and that Jesus is truly present in the kerygma. In this case all speculation regarding the nature of the resurrected, all narratives concerning the empty tomb and all Easter legends, the elements of historical fact that may be present in them and how true their symbolic significance may be, are of no importance any longer (Bultmann 1965c:17).

7 EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

In discussing or evaluating Bultmann's views on John's intention with the resurrection narratives we need not dwell on the issue of composition and resultant tensions in these narratives. Bultmann, as already mentioned, was neither the first nor the last to hold the opinion that certain tensions prevail in these narratives, especially as far as 20:1-8 is concerned (see for example Brown 1972:995-1004; 1027-1031; Schulz 1972:241-242; Haenchen 1980:575-580; Becker 1981:605-631; Schnackenburg 1975:355-361). It should, however, be pointed out that many scholars, while recognising the composite nature of at least 20:1-18, do not experience the same difficulty in these narratives (see for example Barrett 1970:466; Fuller 1980:133-145; Mahoney 1974:224-227; Culpepper 1983).

Turning now to Bultmann's interpretation of the intention of John's resurrection narratives, what comes to mind first is his contention that they were not intended to depict Jesus' resurrection as a historical event, as the return of Jesus to life in this world and therefore as the resuscitation of his dead body. We recall that, according to Bultmann, this is at the same time incredible and historically unverifiable. It has been pointed out many times, and everyone would agree, that nowhere in the New Testament is an account given of the event of the resurrection as such. All that is said is that Jesus is risen, and in the Gospels the reality of this is expressed by the traditions of the empty tomb and the appearances of Jesus. Whether the traditions of the empty tomb go back to an allegedly factual report (Fuller 1980:171) or whether they are later fabrications, deriving their existence and detail from the apologetic need to stress the reality of the resurrection in face of growing denials that it had ever occurred (Mackey 1979:106), is still hotly debated. They are, in any case, in themselves no proof or supporting evidence of the resurrection but rather part of its imagery or symbolism (Mackey 1979:107). The empty tomb did not induce belief either, John 20:8 being the only possible exception. But even in this case it is only said that the other disciple "saw
and believed". Nothing is, however, said about what he believed and no
indication is given that what he believed was that Jesus rose back to life in
this world. This seems to be underscored by John in that Jesus remains
unrecognisable to Mary until he speaks to her, calling her by her name. In
this case, as in the case of the other appearances, it is therefore necessary for
the eyes of the witnesses to be opened before it is possible to recognise Jesus.
Why was this necessary if Jesus appeared in his old body? Or why was it
necessary for Jesus to expressly demonstrate his identity by showing the
marks of his wounds (Marxsen 1975:67)? Marxsen rightly draws attention to
the fact that the body of Jesus is conceived of differently at the different
appearances. On the one hand we have the "material" features (the tomb was
empty; Jesus can be touched), on the other, Jesus can pass through closed
doors (Marxsen 1975:67). And in this connection we must ask ourselves
where the evangelist considered the risen Jesus to be. It seems undeniable
that all these factors point to Jesus' resurrection not being the resuscitation
of his dead body.

This brings us back to the question: what really happened on Easter
morning? Should we agree with the following statement of Künneth: "Dass
der verklärte Leib des erscheinenden Christus nicht mit einer Wieder-
belebung eines toten Körpers gleichzusetzen ist, lassen die Zeugenurteile mit
derselben Deutlichkeit erkennen, wie sie den Gedanken einer Leiblosigkeit
ablehnen" [italics mine] (1982:90). Should we therefore assume an identifi-
able "material" presence of Jesus in the immediate post-Easter period (Wil-
liams 1982:102)? If so, was this material presence due to a transformation of
Jesus' whole being into a new mode of eschatological existence (Fuller
1980:170)? And if so, the resurrection, according to John, can indeed not be
understood as an innerworldly, historical event verifiable by means of cus-
tomary historical investigation. It could then only have been experienced
through faith.

We are all aware of the fact that in recent times we have been warned not
to think in a positivistic manner when we are talking about history or his-
torical investigation. We are warned not to regard as "facts" only those mat-
ters or events that can be investigated and verified from a positivistic, one-
sided historical-critical perspective (O'Collins 1978:15). Add to this the
insights from narratology to the effect that narratives should not be regarded
as depicting reality in the exact or objective sense of the word, but as nar-
rated reality. Narratives, therefore, are not intended to give historical
information. The question "what actually happened" is, according to this view-
point, a modern question. The people who produced these resurrection nar-
ratives were evangelists, not historians. "The resurrection narratives are, in
other words, literary expressions of the evangelists' understanding of what it
means to say: 'Jesus is risen!' They are narrative expressions of a distinctive
theological viewpoint" (Perrin 1977:7).
We have already noted that Bultmann's viewpoint on myth has been criticised as too one-sided and simplistic and that it has had tragic consequences for understanding the language of faith. In this regard Perrin states: "The truth is that myths are the narrative expression of the deepest realities of human experience. Myths are ideas people live by, and for which they are prepared to suffer, to kill and be killed" (Perrin 1977:12). If this is true, and it seems to be, it means that we cannot really disentangle myth from history, since myth "... is material of history and for the history of every age, and it can in no way be contrasted with history" (Mackey 1979:34). Looking at the resurrection narratives from this perspective, should we then concede that "... they are a mixture of mythicised history and historised myth" (Perrin 1977:15)? If we do this, we immediately become aware of a new problem. How do we then distinguish between what is history and what myth?

It seems undeniable that in connection with the resurrection narratives we are not in the same position as is the case of the cross. In the latter case we can distinguish between the historical event of the cross on the one hand and the mythical interpretation of the significance of the cross on the other. This we cannot do as far as the resurrection is concerned, because we obviously have no verifiable historical proof of it, especially if it is true that Jesus' resurrection was a transformation of his whole being into a new mode of eschatological existence. We have only the resurrection narratives as witnesses of faith expressing the conviction "Jesus is risen". What this conviction exactly refers to is difficult if not impossible to tell. Does it refer to an occurrence which personally affected Jesus, or to his raising, ascension, or exaltation to a position of power from which he can infuse new spirit into the lives of his followers? The latter seems rather to be the case. But even if the former was also part and parcel of the conviction, Mackey is probably right in saying that in such a case the former is based on the latter and not the other way round (1979:114).

This would especially apply to the Fourth Gospel, since it is almost generally agreed that, according to this Gospel, "... if there is any single event at which Jesus achieved an exalted status or function, it was at his death, and not at or during any event after that" (Mackey 1979:117). It is also important to note that many of the symbols which were used with reference to the death of Jesus – his raising or exaltation, his glorification, his spirit-breathing – turn up again in the resurrection preaching. This fact undeniably underscores Bultmann's contention that as far as Jesus' exaltation and glorification are concerned, his resurrection was not an occurrence of particular importance compared with his death on the cross.

Taking into consideration what we have observed so far, it would be difficult to differ with Marxsen (1975:128) when he says that the resurrection eludes our grasp. What does not elude us, however, is the resurrection faith. The first witnesses of the resurrection, when saying "Jesus is risen", were not making an observation outside their own experience of finding faith. To say,
however, like Marxsen (1975:128), that the resurrection miracle is the miracle of the birth of faith, is understating the case. In this regard Bultmann is more correct in maintaining that the resurrection was the exalted Jesus' return in the experience of faith, faith in the exalted Jesus. To say therefore that this was not an event experienced by faith would be incorrect. Although not an event apart from the experience of faith and not historically verifiable, it must have been an event in which the exalted Jesus came to those who followed him. It must have been an event which sparked off the Easter faith: "Jesus is risen". But because the event of the resurrection and the event of the origin of the Easter faith are so inextricably linked, one cannot detach the former from the latter for separate contemplation. One believes the kerygma "Jesus is risen", or one does not; and if one does believe, one does not need proof of any kind whatsoever. To believe the kerygma "Jesus is risen", is existentially speaking, to believe oneself as co-crucified and co-resurrected. "Dieses Wort also ist es, das zum Kreuz 'hinzukommt' und es als Heilsgeschehen verständlich macht, indem es Glauben fordert, indem es die Frage an den Menschen richtet, ob er sich als Mitgrequenen und damit auch als Mitauferstanden den verstehen will" [italics mine] (Bultmann 1948:51).

WORKS CONSULTED


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