Also by Rudolf Bultmann.

THEOLOGY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, VOLUMES I & II
ESSAYS—PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL

Jesus Christ and Mythology

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Preface

This small volume contains the Shaffer Lectures which I delivered in October 1951 at Yale University Divinity School and the Cole Lectures, delivered at Vanderbilt University in November 1951. The content of the Shaffer Lectures and of the Cole Lectures was partly identical.

Some of the lectures were also given at other institutions: at Wellesley College, Andover Newton Theological School and Boston University School of Theology; Chicago University (Federated Theological Faculty) and Maywood Lutheran Seminary; Princeton Seminary and Drew Seminary; Hartford Theological Seminary; Emory University; Union Theological Seminary (New York) and Crozer Theological Seminary.

I remember with pleasure my visits to these schools

and am grateful for the kindness with which I was received everywhere, and for all I have learned in numerous discussions with colleagues.

I am especially indebted to Yale University and to Vanderbilt University for inviting me to deliver, respectively, the Shaffer Lectures and the Cole Lectures.

Finally, I express my thanks to Professor Paul Schubert who has prepared the manuscript for publication, and to Professor Erich Dinkler, Mr. D. E. H. Whitely, and Mr. Victor P. Furnish, who have assisted him at various stages of the work.

RUDOLF BULTMANN
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Jesus Christ and Mythology

I

The Message of Jesus and the Problem of Mythology

·1·

The heart of the preaching of Jesus Christ is the Kingdom of God. During the nineteenth century exegesis and theology understood the Kingdom of God as a spiritual community consisting of men joined together by obedience to the will of God which ruled in their wills. By such obedience they sought to enlarge the sphere of His rule in the world. They were building, it was said, the Kingdom of God as a realm which is spiritual but within the world, active and effective in this world, unfolding in the history of this world.

The year 1892 saw the publication of *The Preaching of Jesus about the Kingdom of God* by Johannes Weiss.

This epoch-making book refuted the interpretation which was hitherto generally accepted. Weiss showed that the Kingdom of God is not immanent in the world and does not grow as part of the world's history, but is rather eschatological; i.e., the Kingdom of God transcends the historical order. It will come into being not through the moral endeavour of man, but solely through the supernatural action of God. God will suddenly put an end to the world and to history, and He will bring in a new world, the world of eternal blessedness.

This conception of the Kingdom of God was not an invention of Jesus. It was a conception familiar in certain circles of Jews who were waiting for the end of this world. This picture of the eschatological drama was drawn in Jewish apocalyptic literature, of which the book of Daniel is the earliest still extant. The preaching of Jesus is distinguished from the typical apocalyptic pictures of the eschatological drama and of the blessedness of the coming new age in so far as Jesus refrained from drawing detailed pictures. He confined himself to the statement that the Kingdom of God will come and that men must be prepared to face the coming judgment. Otherwise he shared the eschatological expectations of his contemporaries. That is why he taught his disciples to pray,

Hallowed be thy name,
Thy Kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus expected that this would take place soon, in the immediate future, and he said that the dawning of that

age could already be perceived in the signs and wonders which he performed, especially in his casting out of demons. Jesus envisaged the inauguration of the Kingdom of God as a tremendous cosmic drama. The Son of Man will come with the clouds of heaven, the dead will be raised and the day of judgment will arrive; for the righteous the time of bliss will begin, whereas the damned will be delivered to the torments of hell.

When I began to study theology, theologians as well as laymen were excited and frightened by the theories of Johannes Weiss. I remember that Julius Kaftan, my teacher in dogmatics in Berlin, said: "If Johannes Weiss is right and the conception of the Kingdom of God is an eschatological one, then it is impossible to make use of this conception in dogmatics." But in the following years the theologians, J. Kaftan among them, became convinced that Weiss was correct. Perhaps I may here refer to Albert Schweitzer who carried the theory of Weiss to extremes. He maintains that not only the preaching and the self-consciousness of Jesus but also his day-to-day conduct of life were dominated by an eschatological expectation which amounted to an all-pervading eschatological dogma.

Today nobody doubts that Jesus' conception of the Kingdom of God is an eschatological one—at least in European theology and, as far as I can see, also among American New Testament scholars. Indeed, it has become more and more clear that the eschatological expectation and hope is the core of the New Testament preaching throughout.

The earliest Christian community understood the

Kingdom of God in the same sense as Jesus. It, too, expected the Kingdom of God to come in the immediate future. So Paul, too, thought that he would still be alive when the end of this world was to come and the dead were to be raised. This general conviction is confirmed by the voices of impatience, of anxiety and of doubt which are already audible in the synoptic gospels and which echo a little later and louder, for example, in the Second Epistle of Peter. Christianity has always retained the hope that the Kingdom of God will come in the immediate future, although it has waited in vain. We may cite Mark 9:1, which is not a genuine saying of Jesus but was ascribed to him by the earliest community: "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power." Is not the meaning of this verse clear? Though many of the contemporaries of Jesus are already dead, the hope must nevertheless be retained that the Kingdom of God will still come in this generation.

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This hope of Jesus and of the early Christian community was not fulfilled. The same world still exists and history continues. The course of history has refuted mythology. For the conception "Kingdom of God" is mythological, as is the conception of the eschatological drama. Just as mythological are the presuppositions of the expectation of the Kingdom of God, namely, the theory that the world, although created by God, is ruled

by the devil, Satan, and that his army, the demons, is the cause of all evil, sin and disease. The whole conception of the world which is presupposed in the preaching of Jesus as in the New Testament generally is mythological; i.e., the conception of the world as being structured in three stories, heaven, earth and hell; the conception of the intervention of supernatural powers in the course of events; and the conception of miracles, especially the conception of the intervention of supernatural powers in the inner life of the soul; the conception that men can be tempted and corrupted by the devil and possessed by evil spirits. This conception of the world we call mythological because it is different from the conception of the world which has been formed and developed by science since its inception in ancient Greece and which has been accepted by all modern men. In this modern conception of the world the cause-and-effect nexus is fundamental. Although modern physical theories take account of chance in the chain of cause and effect in subatomic phenomena, our daily living, purposes and actions are not affected. In any case, modern science does not believe that the course of nature can be interrupted or, so to speak, perforated, by supernatural powers.

The same is true of the modern study of history, which does not take into account any intervention of God or of the devil or of demons in the course of history. Instead, the course of history is considered to be an unbroken whole, complete in itself, though differing from the course of nature because there are in history

spiritual powers which influence the will of persons. Granted that not all historical events are determined by physical necessity and that persons are responsible for their actions, nevertheless nothing happens without rational motivation. Otherwise, responsibility would be dissolved. Of course, there are still many superstitions among modern men, but they are exceptions or even anomalies. Modern men take it for granted that the course of nature and of history, like their own inner life and their practical life, is nowhere interrupted by the intervention of supernatural powers.

Then the question inevitably arises: is it possible that Jesus' preaching of the Kingdom of God still has any importance for modern men and the preaching of the New Testament as a whole is still important for modern men? The preaching of the New Testament proclaims Jesus Christ, not only his preaching of the Kingdom of God but first of all his person, which was mythologized from the very beginnings of earliest Christianity. New Testament scholars are at variance as to whether Jesus himself claimed to be the Messiah, the King of the time of blessedness, whether he believed himself to be the Son of Man who would come on the clouds of heaven. If so, Jesus understood himself in the light of mythology. We need not, at this point, decide one way or the other. At any rate, the early Christian community thus regarded him as a mythological figure. It expected him to return as the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven to bring salvation and damnation as judge of the world. His person is viewed in the light of mythology when he is

said to have been begotten of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin, and this becomes clearer still in Hellenistic Christian communities where he is understood to be the Son of God in a metaphysical sense, a great, pre-existent heavenly being who became man for the sake of our redemption and took on himself suffering, even the suffering of the cross. It is evident that such conceptions are mythological, for they were widespread in the mythologies of Jews and Gentiles and then were transferred to the historical person of Jesus. Particularly the conception of the pre-existent Son of God who descended in human guise into the world to redeem mankind is part of the Gnostic doctrine of redemption, and nobody hesitates to call this doctrine mythological. This raises in an acute form the question: *what is the importance of the preaching of Jesus and of the preaching of the New Testament as a whole for modern man?*

For modern man the mythological conception of the world, the conceptions of eschatology, of redeemer and of redemption, are over and done with. Is it possible to expect that we shall make a sacrifice of understanding, *sacrificium intellectus,* in order to accept what we cannot sincerely consider true—merely because such conceptions are suggested by the Bible? Or ought we to pass over those sayings of the New Testament which contain such mythological conceptions and to select other sayings which are not such stumbling-blocks to modern man? In fact, the preaching of Jesus is not confined to eschatological sayings. He proclaimed also the will of God, which is God's demand, the demand for

the good. Jesus demands truthfulness and purity, readiness to sacrifice and to love. He demands that the whole man be obedient to God, and he protests against the delusion that one's duty to God can be fulfilled by obeying certain external commandments. If the ethical demands of Jesus are stumbling-blocks to modern man, then it is to his selfish will, not to his understanding, that they are stumbling-blocks.

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

·3·

It is often said that mythology is a primitive science, the intention of which is to explain phenomena and inci-

dents which are strange, curious, surprising, or frightening, by attributing them to supernatural causes, to gods or to demons. So it *is* in part, for example, when it attributes phenomena like eclipses of the sun or of the moon to such causes; but there is more than this in mythology. Myths speak about gods and demons as powers on which man knows himself to be dependent, powers whose favor he needs, powers whose wrath he fears. Myths express the knowledge that man is not master of the world and of his life, that the world within which he lives is full of riddles and mysteries and that human life also is full of riddles and mysteries.

Mythology expresses a certain understanding of human existence. It believes that the world and human life have their ground and their limits in a power which is beyond all that we can calculate or control. Mythology speaks about this power inadequately and insufficiently because it speaks about it as if it were a worldly power. It speaks of gods who represent the power beyond the visible, comprehensible world. It speaks of gods as if they were men and of their actions as human actions, although it conceives of the gods as endowed with superhuman power and of their actions as incalculable, as capable of breaking the normal, ordinary order of events. It may be said that myths give to the transcendent reality an immanent, this-worldly objectivity. Myths give worldly objectivity to that which is unworldly. (In German one would say, "Der Mythos objektiviert das Jenseitige zum Diesseitigen.")

All this holds true also of the mythological conceptions found in the Bible. According to mythological thinking, God has his domicile in heaven. What is the meaning of this statement? The meaning is quite clear. In a crude manner it expresses the idea that God is beyond the world, that He is transcendent. The thinking which is not yet capable of forming the abstract idea of transcendence expresses its intention in the category of space; the transcendent God is imagined as being at an immense spatial distance, far above the world: for above this world is the world of the stars, of the light which enlightens and makes glad the life of men. When mythological thinking forms the conception of hell, it expresses the idea of the transcendence of evil as the tremendous power which again and again afflicts mankind. The location of hell and of men whom hell has seized is below the earth in darkness, because darkness is tremendous and terrible to men.

These mythological conceptions of heaven and hell are no longer acceptable for modern men since for scientific thinking to speak of "above" and "below" in the universe has lost all meaning, but the idea of the transcendence of God and of evil is still significant.

Another example is the conception of Satan and the evil spirits into whose power men are delivered. This conception rests upon the experience, quite apart from the inexplicable evils arising outside ourselves to which we are exposed, that our own actions are often so puzzling; men are often carried away by their passions and are no longer master of themselves, with the

result that inconceivable wickedness breaks forth from them. Again, the conception of Satan as ruler over the world expresses a deep insight, namely, the insight that evil is not only to be found here and there in the world, but that all particular evils make up one single power which in the last analysis grows from the very actions of men, which form an atmosphere, a spiritual tradition, which overwhelms every man. The consequences and effects of our sins become a power dominating us, and we cannot free ourselves from them. Particularly in our day and generation, although we no longer think mythologically, we often speak of demonic powers which rule history, corrupting political and social life. Such language is metaphorical, a figure of speech, but in it is expressed the knowledge, the insight, that the evil for which every man is responsible individually has nevertheless become a power which mysteriously enslaves every member of the human race.

Now the question arises: is it possible to de-mythologize the message of Jesus and the preaching of the early Christian community? Since this preaching was shaped by the eschatological belief, the first question is this: *What is the meaning of eschatology in general?*

II

The Interpretation of Mythological Eschatology

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In the language of traditional theology eschatology is the doctrine of the last things, and "last" means last in the course of time, that is, the end of the world which is imminent as the future is to our present. But in the actual preaching of the prophets and of Jesus this "last" has a further meaning. As in the conception of heaven the transcendence of God is imagined by means of the category of space, so in the conception of the end of the world, the idea of the transcendence of God is imagined by means of the category of time. However, it is not simply the idea of transcendence as such, but of the importance of the transcendence of God, of God who is

never present as a familiar phenomenon but who is always the coming God, who is veiled by the unknown future. Eschatological preaching views the present time in the light of the future and it says to men that this present world, the world of nature and history, the world in which we live our lives and make our plans is not the only world; that this world is temporal and transitory, yes, ultimately empty and unreal in the face of eternity.

This understanding is not peculiar to mythical eschatology. It is the knowledge to which Shakespeare gives grand expression:

> The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
> And like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on; and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep. . . .
>
> *Tempest IV, 1*

It is the same understanding which was current among the Greeks who did not share the eschatology which was common to the prophets and to Jesus. Permit me to quote from a hymn of Pindar:

> Creatures of a day, what is anyone? what is he not?
> Man is but a dream of a shadow.
>
> *Pythian Odes 8, 95-96*

and from Sophocles:

Alas! we living mortals, what are we
But phantoms all or unsubstantial shades?
Ajax 125-126

The perception of the boundary of human life warns men against "presumption" (ὕβρις) and calls to "thoughtfulness" and "awe" (σωφροσύνη and αἰδώς). "Nothing too much" (μηδὲν ἄγαν), "of strength do not boast" (ἐπὶ ῥώμῃ μὴ καυχῶ) are sayings of Greek wisdom. Greek tragedy shows the truth of such proverbs in its representations of human destiny. From the soldiers slain in the Battle of Plataeae we should learn, as Aeschylus says, that

Mortal man needs must not vaunt him overmuch. . . .
Zeus, of a truth, is a chastiser of overweening pride
And corrects with heavy hand.
Persians 820-828

And again in the *Ajax* of Sophocles Athene says of the mad Ajax,

Warned by these sights, Odysseus, see that thou
Utter no boastful word against the gods,
Nor swell with pride if haply might of arm
Exalt thee o'er thy fellows, or vast wealth.
A day can prostrate and a day upraise
All that is mortal; but the gods approve
Sobriety and frowardness abhor.
127-133

·2·

If it is true that the general human understanding of the insecurity of the present in the face of the future

has found expression in eschatological thought, then we must ask, *what is the difference between the Greek and the Biblical understanding*? The Greeks found the immanent power of the beyond, of the gods compared with whom all human affairs are empty, in "destiny." They do not share the mythological conception of eschatology as a cosmic event at the end of time; and it may well be said that Greek thought is more similar to that of modern man than to the Biblical conception, since for modern man mythological eschatology has passed away. It is possible that the Biblical eschatology may rise again. It will not rise in its old mythological form but from the terrifying vision that modern technology, especially atomic science, may bring about the destruction of our earth through the abuse of human science and technology. When we ponder this possibility, we can feel the terror and the anxiety which were evoked by the eschatological preaching of the imminent end of the world. To be sure, that preaching was developed in conceptions which are no longer intelligible today, but they do express the knowledge of the finiteness of the world, and of the end which is imminent to us all because we all are beings of this finite world. This is the insight to which as a rule we turn a blind eye, but which may be brought to light by modern technology. It is precisely the intensity of this insight which explains why Jesus, like the Old Testament prophets, expected the end of the world to occur in the immediate future. The majesty of God and the inescapability of His judgment, and over

against these the emptiness of the world and of men were felt with such an intensity that it seemed that the world was at an end, and that the hour of crisis was present. Jesus proclaims the will of God and the responsibility of man, pointing towards the eschatological events, but it is not because he is an eschatologist that he proclaims the will of God. On the contrary, he is an eschatologist because he proclaims the will of God.

The difference between the Biblical and the Greek understanding of the human situation regarding the unknown future can now be seen in a clearer light. It consists in the fact that in the thinking of the prophets and of Jesus the nature of God involves more than simply His omnipotence and His judgment touches not only the man who offends Him by presumption and boasting. For the prophets and for Jesus God is the Holy One, who demands right and righteousness, who demands love of neighbour and who therefore is the judge of all human thoughts and actions. The world is empty not only because it is transitory, but because men have turned it into a place in which evil spreads and sin rules. The end of the world, therefore, is the judgment of God; that is, the eschatological preaching not only brings to consciousness the emptiness of the human situation and calls men, as was the case among the Greeks, to moderation, humility and resignation; it calls men first and foremost to responsibility toward God and to repentance. It calls them to perform the will of God. Thus, the characteristic difference between

the eschatological preaching of Jesus and that of the Jewish apocalypses becomes evident. All the pictures of future happiness in which apocalypticism excels are lacking in the preaching of Jesus.

Though in this connection we do not examine other differences between Biblical and Greek thought, as, for instance, the personality of the one holy God, the personal relationship between God and man, and the Biblical belief that God is the creator of the world, we must consider one more important point. The eschatological preaching proclaims the imminent end of the world, not only as the final judgment, but also as the beginning of the time of salvation and of eternal bliss. The end of the world has not only a negative but also a positive meaning. To use nonmythological terms, the finiteness of the world and of man over against the transcendent power of God contains not only warning, but also consolation. Let us ask whether the ancient Greeks also speak in this way about the emptiness of the world and of this-worldly affairs. I think that we can hear such a voice in Euripides' question,

> Who knows if to live is really to die,
> and if to die is to live?
>
> *Frg. 638 (ed. Nauck)*

At the end of his speech to his judges, Socrates says,

> But now the time has come to go away. I go to die and you to live; but which of us goes to the better lot, is known to none but God.
>
> *Apol. 42a*

In a similar vein the Platonic Socrates says,

> If the soul is immortal, we must care for it, not only in respect to this time, which we call life, but in respect to all time.
>
> *Phaed. 107c.*

Above all, we should think of this famous saying,

> practice dying
> *Phaed. 67e*

This, according to Plato, is the characteristic feature of the life of the philosopher. Death is the separation of the soul from the body. As long as man lives, the soul is bound to the body and to its needs. The philosopher lives his life detaching his soul as much as possible from communion with the body, for the body disturbs the soul and hinders it from attaining the truth. The philosopher looks for cleansing, that is, for release from the body, and so he "gives heed to dying."

If we may call the Platonic hope in life after death an eschatology, then the Christian eschatology agrees with the Platonic eschatology in so far as each expects bliss after death and also in so far as bliss may be called *freedom*. This freedom is for Plato the freedom of the spirit from the body, the freedom of the spirit which can perceive the truth which is the very reality of being; and for Greek thinking, of course, the realm of reality is also the realm of beauty. According to Plato, this transcendent bliss can be described not only in negative and abstract, but also in positive terms. Since the

transcendent realm is the realm of truth and truth is to be found in discussion, that is, in dialogue, Plato can picture the transcendent realm positively as a sphere of dialogue. Socrates says that it would be best if he could spend his life in the beyond in examining and exploring as he did on this side. "To converse and associate with them and examine them would be immeasurable happiness" (*Apol.* 41c).

In Christian thinking freedom is not the freedom of a spirit who is satisfied with perceiving the truth; it is the freedom of man to be himself. Freedom is freedom from sin, from wickedness, or as St. Paul says, from the flesh, from the old self, because God is Holy. Thus, obtaining bliss means obtaining grace and righteousness by God's judgment. Moreover, it is impossible to depict the ineffable blessedness of those who are justified, save in symbolic pictures such as a splendid banquet, or in such pictures as the Revelation of John paints. According to Paul, "the kingdom of God does not mean food and drink but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). And Jesus said, "when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Mark 12:25). The physical body is replaced by the spiritual body. To be sure, our imperfect knowledge will then become perfect, and then we shall see face to face, as Paul says (I Cor. 13:9-12). But that is by no means knowledge of truth in the Greek sense, but an untroubled relationship with God, as Jesus promised that the pure in heart shall see God (Matt. 5:8).

If we can say anything more, it is that the action of God reaches its fulfilment in the glory of God. Thus the Church of God in the present has no other purpose than to praise and glorify God by its conduct (Phil. 1:11) and by its thanksgiving (II Cor. 1:20; 4:15; Rom. 15:6f.). Therefore, the future Church in the state of perfection cannot be thought of otherwise than as a worshiping community which sings hymns of praise and thanksgiving. We can see examples of this in the Revelation of John.

Surely both conceptions of transcendent bliss are mythological, the Platonic conception of bliss as philosophical dialogue as well as the Christian conception of blessedness as worship. Each conception intends to speak about the transcendent world as a world where man reaches the perfection of his true, real essence. This essence can be realized only imperfectly in this world, but nevertheless it determines life in this world as a life of seeking, and longing and yearning.

The difference between the two conceptions is due to different theories of human nature. Plato conceives the realm of spirit as a realm without time and without history because he conceives human nature as not subject to time and history. The Christian conception of the human being is that man is essentially a temporal being, which means that he is an historical being who has a past which shapes his character and who has a future which always brings forth new encounters. Therefore the future after death and beyond this world is a future of the totally new. This is the *totaliter aliter*.

Then there will be "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1, II Peter 3:13). The seer of the future Jerusalem hears a voice, "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21:5). Paul and John anticipate this newness. Paul says, "If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (II Cor. 5:17), and John says, "I am writing you a new commandment, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining" (I John 2:8). But that newness is not a visible one, for our new life "is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3), "it does not yet appear what we shall be" (I John 3:2). In a certain manner this unknown future is present in the holiness and love which characterize the believers in the Holy Spirit which inspired them, and in the worship of the Church. It cannot be described except in symbolic pictures: "for in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience" (Rom. 8:24-5). Therefore, this hope or this faith may be called readiness for the unknown future that God will give. In brief, it means to be open to God's future in the face of death and darkness.

This, then, is the deeper meaning of the mythological preaching of Jesus—to be open to God's future which is really imminent for every one of us; to be prepared for this future which can come as a thief in the night when we do not expect it; to be prepared, because this future will be a judgment on all men who have bound

themselves to this world and are not free, not open to God's future.

·3·

The eschatological preaching of Jesus was retained and continued by the early Christian community in its mythological form. But very soon the process of de-mythologizing began, partially with Paul, and radically with John. The decisive step was taken when Paul declared that the turning point from the old world to the new was not a matter of the future but did take place in the coming of Jesus Christ. "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son" (Gal. 4:4). To be sure, Paul still expected the end of the world as a cosmic drama, the *parousia* of Christ on the clouds of heaven, the resurrection from the dead, the final judgment, but with the resurrection of Christ the decisive event has already happened. The Church is the eschatological community of the elect, of the saints who are already justified and are alive because they are in Christ, in Christ who as the second Adam abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (Rom. 5:12-14; II Tim. 1:10). "Death is swallowed up in victory" (I Cor. 15:54). Therefore, Paul can say that the expectations and promises of the ancient prophets are fulfilled when the gospel is proclaimed: "Behold, now is the acceptable time [about which Isaiah spoke]; behold, now is the day of salvation" (II Cor. 6:2). The Holy Spirit who was expected as the gift of the time of blessedness has already been given. In this manner the future is anticipated.

This de-mythologizing may be observed in a particular instance. In the Jewish apocalyptic expectations, the expectation of the Messianic kingdom played a role. The Messianic kingdom is, so to speak, an *interregnum* between the old world time (οὗτος ὁ αἰών) and the new age (ὁ μέλλων αἰών). Paul explains this apocalyptic, mythological idea of the Messianic *interregnum*, at the end of which Christ will deliver the Kingdom to God the Father, as the present time between the resurrection of Christ and his coming *parousia* (I Cor. 15:24); that means, the present time of preaching the gospel *is* really the formerly expected time of the Kingdom of the Messiah. Jesus is now the Messiah, the Lord.

After Paul, John de-mythologized the eschatology in a radical manner. For John the coming and departing of Jesus is the eschatological event. "And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). "Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out" (12:31). For John the resurrection of Jesus, Pentecost and the *parousia* of Jesus are one and the same event, and those who believe have already eternal life. "He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already" (3:18). "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him" (3:36). "Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" (5:25). "I am the resurrection and the life; he

who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" (11:25f.).

As in Paul, so in John de-mythologizing may be further observed in a particular instance. In Jewish eschatological expectations we find that the figure of the anti-Christ is a thoroughly mythological figure as it is described, for example, in II Thessalonians (2:7-12). In John false teachers play the role of this mythological figure. Mythology has been transposed into history. These examples show, it seems to me, that de-mythologizing has its beginning in the New Testament itself, and therefore our task of de-mythologizing today is justified.

III

The Christian Message and the Modern World-View

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An objection often heard against the attempt to de-mythologize is that it takes the modern world-view as the criterion of the interpretation of the Scripture and the Christian message and that Scripture and Christian message are not allowed to say anything that is in contradiction with the modern world-view.

It is, of course, true that de-mythologizing takes the modern world-view as a criterion. To de-mythologize is to reject not Scripture or the Christian message as a whole, but the world-view of Scripture, which is the world-view of a past epoch, which all too often is retained in Christian dogmatics and in the preaching