

? Excursus on Bullmann

Paul asserts that he had received, from God or from the apostles before him, the preaching of Christ's death for our sins. Not only is this said here, but it was earlier emphasized in 1: 18, 23^{and}, 2: 2, 8. This is enough, one would think, to justify calling the death of Christ, and his resurrection, the kernel of the gospel.

The term kernel is figurative and therefore ambiguous. At the very least one may say that in Christianity the preaching of the cross is indispensable. It is also elementary — in the

sense that it is nearly the first thing that must be declared to ~~evangelists~~ the heathen. There are other factors

that are indispensable, though they may not be the first thing to be said in evangelistic or missionary endeavor.

The cross and the resurrection may be called the kernel of the gospel because also they are repeated the most frequently, and ~~are~~ are the theme of more hymns than any other subject. All this is so

obvious that a minimum of scholarship is needed to discover it, and a maximum

of perversity to distort it. Perverse scholarship, however, occurs.

Not the most perverse, and some would say the least, is Oscar Bullmann, who, in his Christ and

Time - The Primitive Christian Conception

of Time and History, discusses the

kernel of the gospel. His Foreword

states, "The object of the present work is to determine what is central in the Christian proclamation" (p. 11).

This, he says, is "the one great test of New Testament scholarship, and perhaps of all Christian theology."

Although it would seem that no

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great scholarship is needed to answer this question, several gentlemen who are recognized as scholars have given divergent answers. To those Bullmann ^{replies} ~~gives~~ the ~~reminder~~ that "the essential Christian kernel" cannot be determined on the basis of personal preference. ~~It must be based on~~ The determination must be based on "the ancient writings themselves."

He then rephrases the question for the sake of clarity: "In what does the specifically Christian element of the New Testament consist? That is to say, precisely what is there which it does not have in common with philosophical or religious systems?" (p. 12).

At this point difficulty sets in. Even on a very superficial level, the death and resurrection of Christ (and to prevent further misunderstanding, be it noted that Gullmann does not stress these two events as Paul does) are not the only factors that can be designated as the "specifically Christian element" in the New Testament. Or, to use Gullmann's other phraseology, they are not the only factors that are "precisely what is there which it does not have in common with philosophical or religious ~~systems~~ systems." ³³ The doctrine of the immediate imputation of Adam's sin, though it does not receive

the frequent mention that the crucifixion receives, is equally foreign to other religious systems. On a less superficial level one can argue that the Christian concept of God has nothing in common with any non-Christian system. Not only is the Christian conception Trinitarian, ~~but the complex of personification, verbal revelation, historical content of history,~~ but the complex of omnipotence, love, justice, irresistible grace, sanctification, all of which together with ~~some~~ other factors are integral to the Christian concept of God, leaves only a verbal similarity between the term as used in Islam or Hinduism and as found in the Bible ¹.

1. For a detailed argument, see Religion Reason and Revelation, G.H. Clark, Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1961

However, Bullmann believes that while much of Biblical Theology is common to other systems, there is one unique element. This single element is the Christian concept of time. As one reads further into Bullmann's book, one wonders if this is a single element or whether it is a series of events. Clearly the term time is not used in the usual Aristotelian, Kantian, philosophic, and scientific meanings. Indeed, Bullmann nowhere defines time, and the Einsteinian problem of identifying simultaneity is far from his thought. He actually means history, not time. Now, history may consist of many events, but it is convenient to treat it as the single factor that distinguishes Christianity from Hinduism, Greek philosophy, and ~~the~~.

physical science.

Bullmann now lays the foundation for his theory by noting how our modern calendars count the years. About A. D. 500 the Christian west began to ~~number~~ date events as so many years after the birth of Christ. As late as A. D. 1700 ~~there was~~ there arose the custom of also dating events as so many years before the birth of Christ. Our present calendars therefore are not linear from creation, as the Jewish calendar is, but are linear in two directions from a center. This agrees, Bullman says, with "the Primitive Christian conception of time and history." Now, whether primitive Christians (Peter, Matthew,

and mark?) had any clear concept of time or history may be doubted; but that this general scheme is Christian ~~is~~ need not be contested.

The next step is to assert that "the theological affirmation which lies at the basis of the Christian chronology ... asserts ... that from this mid-point all history is to be understood and judged" (p. 19). From this mid-point an "unlimited series of numbers" starts off in both directions.

~~But~~ But let us readers not be carried away in both directions by enthusiasms. It does not seem correct to say that all history shall be judged by an event that took place in the year one. Say indeed that the Father has committed all judgment to the Son; that judgment is pronounced on the basis of divine law, and that acquittal depends

on the imputed righteousness of Christ; but it is loose talk to say that history will be judged by an event in the year one. Further loose talk is found in an "unlimited series of numbers." This is good arithmetic, but it is false as Christian history. The creation of man occurred a finite number of years before the birth of Christ, and history ~~will~~ will end a finite number of years afterward. These rather obvious flaws in the argument, though they could be corrected, or without damage forgotten, warn the reader to be alert at every step.

Granting, however, that the Christian presupposition underlying the construction of our calendar is foreign to the principles of secular historiography, we also grant that equally foreign to secularism is the Biblical restrictions

of interest to a limited series of events.

Abraham and his family are important, but
that of the Chaldees is not. The Exodus
is important, but Egyptian history
before Jacob and after Moses is useless.

Jesus was born during the reign of Augustus,
but the Punic Wars are irrelevant.

Secular historians, while recognizing
certain periods as more important in
one way or another, treat all ages
and all nations as equal in principle.

H. Cullmann very appropriately uses
locusts to express this secular viewpoint:

"Jews and Christians appear to me like
a host of bats or ants who come out of
their hiding places, or like ... worms
who hold a meeting in the corner of

their manure pile and say to one another,

'To us God reveals and proclaims
everything. He does not trouble himself

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with the rest of the world"

1. The same argument is found in God and Earth, written by C. E. M. Joad before his conversion.

~~After this~~

But with this excellent quotation from Coleridge in mind, Bullmann somehow manages to contradict himself by stating, "Even from this viewpoint [This Christian viewpoint which ignores China and the Incas] there remains wide room for the historian to carry on his particular task of organizing and investigating general history, as he is accustomed to do, in quite other 'secular' connections, and he can do this without coming into conflict with Primitive Christianity's Christocentric view of history" (p 20). Of course, this is precisely what the

secular historian cannot do. His description or construction of events has no place for a final divine judgment, at least for the kind of divine judgment described in the New Testament. His view of the nature of any event is totally inconsistent with the Christian concept of events.

Bullmann in fact admits this, for in the very next paragraph he says,

"The latter [Christian] view, however, makes the claim . . . to render a final judgment even on the facts of general history . . ." (p. 20). But

this judgment is, in part, that the secular historian is wrong.

The importance of the contrast between Christian and secular history sharpens as Bullmann develops his Thesis. The secular historian, he says, will always consider the series of events chosen by the Christian to be a peculiar selection. But what he considers peculiar, ~~and~~ arbitrary, and queer, is precisely the essence of Christianity.

In fact, asserts Bullmann, "all Christian Theology in its innermost essence is Biblical history. . . . [Christ] has become history in all his fullness. . . . The historical work of Jesus of Nazareth is regarded as the full [ital. his] expression of ^{the} ~~the~~ divine revelatory action. . . ." (pp 23, 24)

modern

This is not the ^{modern} peculiar view;
 but it is not the Biblical view either.
 The reason is that for all his
 insistence on divine revelation, his
 idea of revelation differs from that of
 the Bible. There is of course a sense
 in which events like the Exodus,
 or even an auto accident, reveal
 God. Yet while ~~the Bible~~

~~is not of divine origin, is indispensable~~

Christianity ^{would be a false religion if} ~~could not exist if~~
 the events of Mall's history were not historical,
~~those events had not happened by~~
 these events by themselves would
 reveal no more about God than
 an auto accident.

The central issue here is revelation. Bullmann is so suspicious of anything ~~metaphysical~~ "speculative, philosophical, metaphysical" that he writes "Everything that the first Christians proclaim in their writings is revelation of God's action in Christ" (p. 26). Yet between these two quotations he refers to "the earliest two-part confession" where "it is said, One (ital his) God the Father, from whom are all things . . ." Now, orthodox Christianity does not deny that Christ was the agent in creation; but the proclamation of "One God" is not a "revelation of God's action in Christ." It is a theological, theocentric, not Christocentric,

confession, ~~whose~~ ~~con~~ which can even be called philosophical and metaphysical. This confession is a revelation; it is not an historical event.

~~As Theological and Trinitarian,~~

Since it is Theological and, even without explicit mention of the Holy Spirit, essentially Trinitarian, it is strange that on these very pages Gullmann declares "with every other division [of creeds into sections] even the trinitarian, ~~one~~ one runs the risk of introducing into the New Testament, a later speculative formulation of questions which is foreign to Primitive Christianity; one runs the risk of obliterating or at least of weakening Primitive Christianity's

through orientation to revelatory and redemptive history. . . . Under the influence of Greek speculative thought, [~~the doctrine of the Trinity~~] [The Trinitarian debates] permit Primitive Christianity's central conception of time and history to fall into the background.

Now, first of all, the doctrine of the Trinity is nowhere to be found in Greek philosophy. Nor is Greek Philosophy anywhere to be found in Athanasius. His de Secretis contains only two minor and derogatory references to the ~~philosophical~~ philosophical schools.

In the second place, The Nicene Creed definitely, even prominently asserts historical events: "Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by

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The Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and
was made man, and was crucified
also for us under Pontius Pilate. He
suffered and was buried; and the
third day he rose again, according to
the Scriptures. . . ."

This can hardly be described
as permitting Primitive Christianity's
emphasis on history to fall into the
background. ~~The point is that Bullmann~~

~~this~~ Bullmann apparently
thinks that any addition to the
bare, uninterpreted ~~facts~~ events
obscures or denies them. He

does not seem to see that event
plus explanation does not equal
no event.

Now, some of his argumentation is very fine as a reply to Bultmann and other neoorthodox or dialectical theologians. Nothing could be more true or more applicable than his ~~remark~~ remark that no one can reject all history, and still preserve Christian faith. Renan and ~~the~~ many nineteenth century critics claimed to preserve Christianity by discarding history and erecting an ethical religion based on — only some statements in — the Sermon on the Mount. ~~In this century~~
~~Bultmann discards history as a~~
~~culturally conditioned first century~~
~~framework and "preserves" its~~
~~existential meaning. Against~~

Albert Schweitzer, even though he put
 an end to ethical modernism by
 showing — what every orthodox Christian
 had always known — that eschatology
 cannot be eradicated from primitive
 Christianity, discarded the history,
~~and~~ dismissed Jesus as
 insane, and built a religion on
 the principle of reverence for life.
 Bultmann too discards the historical
 events as merely a literary, culturally-
 conditioned ~~framework~~ first century
 framework and "preserves" the
 disciples' remarkable anticipations
 of French existentialisms. Against
 the total ~~the~~ eradication of history,
 Bultmann's judgment is just.

But there are two points which vitiate Bullmann's construction. The first has already been stated. To defend history by denying the Biblical explanation of the events destroys Christian faith as much as existentialism does. The explanation includes the doctrine of the Trinity, the eternal decree, and a complex of doctrines which, though not themselves historical, underly the events. Were the arbitrary, ingenious, and subjective explanations of every theologian and critic ~~equally authoritative, the result would be that~~ brought into court on an equal footing, the result would be that no meaning could authoritatively be assigned to any event, and

① explain

I expect would differ.

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That non-authoritatively every meaning
could be assigned.

But orthodox Christianity has
always asserted the Biblical explanations
of these events. Revelation is not confined
to the events or such; They reveal almost
nothing. Revelation must include, ~~and~~
in a very real sense revelation must be
a verbal communication of truth. But
this is what Bullmann will not accept.

"We do not intend to support a rigid
Biblicism; for it is characteristic of
such a false Biblicistic attitude that
it treats all (i.e. his) of equal
worth. . . ." The last half of this
sentence is nothing less than pejorative
propaganda. Biblicism, if we call
it that, acknowledges that the
genealogies in ~~E~~Chronicles are

At the beginning of this discussion of Gullmann it was noted that Paul delivered what he had received, that Christ died, was buried, and rose again on the third day. Surely, if anything, this is the "kernel" of the gospel. But can Gullmann certify this kernel. Indeed he cannot. Once he rejects the Bible, the truth of the Bible, he cannot accept those events as the kernel. ~~on any basis other than~~ by anything other than personal preference. They are not the kernel because the Bible says so. But suppose someone prefers to accept the genealogies as the kernel? ~~Can~~ The modernists

~~is not a kernel of the gospel.~~
~~As soon as we reject all modernists,~~
~~in favor of the Bible, we are left with~~
~~the Bible as our only authority.~~

It is therefore instructive to note that although Bullmann does indeed upon occasion refer to "the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ," he rather prefers vague phrases such as the "Christ-event" (p. 44) or the "Christ-deed" (~~pp. 53, 54~~). But if anyone wish to insist on his several references to the death of Jesus, the question recurs, of what significance is this death? The bare event is meaningless.

The Apostle Paul, with his emphasis on the historicity of the death and resurrection, says more than Bullmann.

less important than the contents of
 Rom 5:12-21. But they are ~~of~~ true and
 equally true. Bullmann's insistence
 on history is a denial that the Bible
 is revelation. For him it is at best
 a record of revelation, a record, however,
 that consists of the fallible interpretations
 of events by well meaning but uncritical
 writers. Perhaps the Bible is not even a witness
 to revelation; but only a witness to the faith of some people
 that they had received a revelation (p. 31).

This view of revelation, Bullmann's
 restriction of revelation to actions or
 events, is the second and final point
 that vitiate his construction. For, if
 revelation consists entirely of events,
 there is no way to determine what
 the events were. Bullmann's
 defense of history evaporates history.

he is remarkably silent on the crucifixion,
~~buried, and~~

~~In fine, Paul says a little
more than the last quotation included.~~

He says four words more (in Greek three),
viz. "according to the Scriptures."

"Christ died for our sins according to
the Scriptures, he was buried, he
was raised on the Third day, according
to the Scriptures" In this extremely

short statement Paul mentions the
Scriptures twice. Bullmann
discards the Scriptural explanation,
and with it loses ~~simplicity,~~
~~abandonment, brevity,~~
~~intelligibility.~~

sin, crucifixion, resurrection,
and history as well.

"ground of actuality," seems paradoxical to say the least. While actual entities are themselves limited by the past and their "subjective aim," as is God in regard to his consequent nature, is the non-actuality of God's primordial nature comprehensible either within or without Whitehead's system?

The experience of ideals, standards, "is the experience of the deity of the universe."⁵ In another place, Whitehead writes that "the purpose of God is the attainment of value in the temporal world."⁶ Such ideals and/or values are not implemented by coercion or force, but by persuasion, i.e. love.⁷ Man is to be "lured" to the achievement of the ideal. In Process and Reality Whitehead writes that subjective aims "are valuations determining the relative relevance of eternal objects for each occasion of actuality."⁸ God's relevance to each creative act is as the "initial 'object of desire'" that establishes "the initial phase of each subjective aim."⁹ God thus functions as the principle of limitation by ordering the infinite possibilities of the eternal objects according to the principles of value in the selection of individual subjective aims for individual actual entities.

The identity of God in Whitehead's philosophical theology.--Probably one of the most difficult aspects to comprehend in Whitehead's doctrine of God is that God is an actual entity among other actual entities. To realize that

⁵Alfred North Whitehead, Modes of Thought (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938), p. 103.

⁶A. N. Whitehead, Religion in the Making (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1926, 1960), p. 97.

⁷Process and Reality, pp. 520-521.

⁸Ibid., p. 522.

⁹Ibid.