

I suddenly realized, while rereading Bultmann's essay, "Die christliche Hoffnung und das Problem der Entmythologisierung," that the way of demythologizing mythological pictures of hope that he calls "spiritualizing" them includes, in addition to the several different positions he considers, all noncognitivist interpretations of mythology. Thus it includes the kind of position he himself rejects, according to which mythological talk of God's act is not a way of talking about "an act in a fully real, 'objective' sense," but "only a pictorial way of designating subjective experiences" (NTM: 110 f.). But spiritualizing also includes the position I criticize in my essay, "The Promise of Faith," in *The Reality of God*, as a "misunderstanding" of Bultmann's own position (215-220). And it even includes, I would argue—if only with certain qualifications—the kind of noncognitivist position argued for by John Post.

Clearly, Bultmann's own way of demythologizing by means of existentialist interpretation is closer to at least some spiritualist positions than it is to the other ways he considers, viz., "sacramentalism" and "secularism." Indeed, he's explicit in saying that his way, which is obviously the way that, in his view, began already with Paul and, especially, John, expresses a "legitimate interest" of spiritualism—namely, that "the experience of God's grace is fulfilment of the present." But there remains the important difference that his way, like Paul's and John's, doesn't miss, as spiritualism does, "the peculiar dialectical relationship of present and future," that "fulfilment of the present means at the same time its determination by the future, that the present God is at the same time the coming God." The new life that is indeed already present to the believer remains ever future, never to be simply possessed, any more than faith is a once-for-all conviction that one possesses, but always only to be laid hold of anew by an ever new act of faith. On Bultmann's interpretation, Paul and John both uphold this dialectical relationship—Paul by retaining the earlier apocalyptic expectation alongside his insistence that the decisive event has already occurred in Jesus' (first) coming, John by appropriating the Gnostic hope of souls' ascent after death to the world of light. Bultmann, for his part, upholds it by insisting on the transcendence of the God who ever remains the coming

God, the God whose transcendence is his futurity and ^{who} is present only as always coming.

My point is that the dialectic of present and future is an empty phrase unless it can be interpreted in transcendental metaphysical terms. That is, the God who is present only as the God who is ever future is the universal individual who is primordially and everlastingly consequent as well as primordial, the final end as well as the primal source of all things.

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