

# Kerygma and History in the Theology of Rudolf Karl Bultmann: A Biblical-Theological Study

Osei-Acheampong Desmond Tutu, Robert Osei-Bonsu

**Abstract—** Kerygma and history in the theology of Rudolf Karl Bultmann is one of the controversial issues in the Biblical-theological study. The topic has received divergent opinions from Biblical-theological scholars. Some scholars portrayed “kerygma” as the proclamation or preaching of the cross. The questions motivated by this study is that, how does Scripture be demythologized? What is the right presupposition method employed to interpret the Scripture and shape the theological ideas? What does the Greek word “kerygma” imply? How does Rudolf Bultmann’s kerygma contribute to Christian theology? The paper will educate and inform the readers that Demythologization is the hermeneutical method which focuses on the Biblical texts to remove mysteries to get sound theological teachings. The Greek kerygma is originated from the ancient Greek word ‘keruyma which implies proclamation or preaching of the gospel. Rudolf Bultmann contributed positively to Christian theology in demythologized and dialectical methods.

**Index Terms—** Kerygma, History, Theology, Rudolf Karl Bultmann.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Rudolf Karl Bultmann was born on 20<sup>th</sup> August, 1884 in Wiefelstede, Germany.<sup>1</sup> He died 30<sup>th</sup> July, 1976 in Marbury, Germany. He became a renowned Biblical scholar, existentialist, a demythologized theologian who argued for an existentialism.<sup>2</sup> He was a significant leader of the New Testament theology, existentialist, a demythologized theologian.<sup>3</sup> He was a philosopher and Biblical teacher. Rudolf Karl Bultmann wrote his first book called The History of the Synoptic gospel in 1921.<sup>4</sup> This book is the discipline form of criticism. He later published a book known as The New Testament and Mythology.<sup>5</sup>

Osei-Acheampong Desmond Tutu, PhD Student at Adventist University of Africa, Kenya-Nairobi  
Professor Robert Osei-Bonsu, Dean of Theological Seminary at Adventist University of Africa

<sup>1</sup> Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting* (London: Fontana, 1964), 18.

<sup>2</sup> Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 63.

<sup>3</sup> Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *Theology as a Science*, *The New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 34.

<sup>4</sup> Rudolf Karl Bultmann, “Liberal Theology and the Latest Theological Movement,” *In Faith and Understanding* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 52.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

He unified theological vision dubbed modern interpreters to make the texts in the New Testament clear.<sup>6</sup> He was considered as best twentieth century German philosopher and theological liberalist. He had an outstanding approach to hermeneutics of the New Testament which yielded him to a proponent of dialectical and demythologized approach.<sup>7</sup> From Paul S. Fiddes, Bultmann introduced the “kerygma” in the Bible Testament of New.<sup>8</sup> Kerygma is a Greek word which denotes proclamation.<sup>9</sup> According to Craig A. Carter, the Greek word kerygma can be translated as the proclamation of the cross or Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup> The kerygma (the proclamation of the cross) in the theology of Rudolf Karl Bultmann has become the bone of contention through many centuries.<sup>11</sup> Thus, many theologians tried to interpret it to reach the understanding of Christian believers, but most of these attempts proved fiasco. It is upon this reason why the researcher wants to investigate this topic to bring barest understanding to the contemporary Christian.

The paper is aimed at assisting people to grasp the proclamation of the gospel.<sup>12</sup> The paper is limited to Bultmann’s kerygma theology. The essence of the research portrayed systematical and historical studies of the kerygma of Karl Rudolf. The documentary research method was applied in the research. Both primary and secondary materials were used in the study. Thus, Electronic Library, archives, reports and brochures employed for the study. The research study pinpointed Rudolf Bultmann’s early career, philosophical concept, theological approach, theological meaning of kerygma, kerygma in Old and in New Testament, kerygma in the theology of Rudolf Bultmann, critiques, contribution to Christian theology, summary, conclusion and bibliography.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Rudolf Kar Bultmann, “The Problem of a Theological Exegesis of the New Testament,” *In the Beginnings of Dialectical Theology* (Richmond VA: John Knox, 1986), 236.

<sup>8</sup> Paul S. Fiddes, *The Promised End: Eschatology in Theology and Literature* (Malden: Blackwell, 2000), 88.

<sup>9</sup> Rudolf Karl Bultmann, “Liberal Theology and the Latest Theological Movement,” *In Faith and Understanding* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 91.

<sup>10</sup> Craig A. Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2006), 78.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

### Rudolf Bultmann's Early Career

According to David H. Kelsey, Rudolf Karl Bultmann was the son of Lutheran pastor and the grandson of a missionary.<sup>13</sup> He followed academic theological career and began his theological studies at the University of Tubingen at age 19.<sup>14</sup> In 1912, he completed his theological seminary and appointed as a lecturer at the University of Marburg. Later, he taught at the University of Breslau and Giessen in 1916 and 1920 respectively.<sup>15</sup> In 1921, he appointed as a senior lecturer of Biblical Studies at University of Marburg.<sup>16</sup> Karl Bultmann remained at University of Marburg until his retirement in 1951. According to Van A. Harvey, Rudolf Karl Bultmann published an article captioned in German language "Geschichte der Tradition."<sup>17</sup> This implies the historical synoptic tradition. The writings of Karl Bultmann denote the proclamation of the cross or the gospel. The purpose of the article was to trace tradition in Scripture. It established the reputation of Rudolf Bultmann as a great theological scholar who wrote books on Jesus and, Jesus and the word in 1926 and 1934 respectively.<sup>18</sup> He was influenced by the philosophy of Martin Heidegger which focused on the essence of human's existence.<sup>19</sup>

### Rudolf Karl Bultmann's Philosophical Concept

According to Alister E. McGrath, Rudolf Karl Bultmann was an existentialist philosopher. Bultmann suggests that every interpreter tackles the Scripture with presuppositions.<sup>20</sup> Thus, every Biblical passage is surrounded by myth which has to be demythologized. According to Rudolf Karl Bultmann, presuppositions are not valid idea.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the presuppositions should base on the method rather than the content.<sup>22</sup> From Bultmann, it is problematic to assume content of what one will believe without giving any evidence. Bultmann posits that presuppositions are portrayed to discover the truth and investigate philosophical and theological issues.<sup>23</sup> He again unraveled that the key question

asks is, what is the right presuppositional method employed to interpret the Scripture and shape the theological ideas?<sup>24</sup> He unpacked that when the believers read the Bible, we focus our interest on what the Bible gives to us than how does the Scripture influence our lives?<sup>25</sup> Here, Bultmann concerned with the possibilities of understanding humans' existence which is necessary to portray the adequate conceptions that can be expressed. Therefore, he indicated that the conceptions can be revealed through the task of philosophy. Hence, the need for philosophy in theological studies and interpretation.

### Theological Approach of Rudolf Karl Bultmann

Radically speaking, Rudolf Karl Bultmann adopted hermeneutical theological method in his theological issues and development in the context of demythologization.<sup>26</sup> According to Roger E. Olson, Bultmann tagged the supernatural worldview of the New Testament as myth.<sup>27</sup> He said a myth is something which is difficult to believe. Myth is allegorically grasping of a concept.<sup>28</sup> The ancient people in the New Testament expressed their self-understanding their place in the universe and the meaning of life in supernatural images. While modern people cannot believe these images literally. Rudolf Karl Bultmann radically demonstrated that myth is supernatural elements which dictates humans and the globe.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the motive is impeded and obscured by the modern people of the terms in which it is explained in the New Testament. He debatably insisted that the Biblical scholars and theologians should demythologize the gospel message in the New Testament to make it clear for people to understand, hence the need for demythologization.<sup>30</sup> Demythologization is the hermeneutical method which focuses on the Biblical texts to remove mysteries to get sound theological teachings.<sup>31</sup> He emphatically posited that the best method of explaining the mythological elements in the New Testament existentially was demythologization.

In view of the hermeneutic of demythologization, Rudolf Karl Bultmann employed the interpreters' interaction to the Scriptural text.<sup>32</sup> He insisted that every believer who

<sup>13</sup> David H. Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theology Anthropology 2 Vol* (Louisville: Westminster, 2009), 124.

<sup>14</sup> Nathan Kerr, *Christ, History and Apocalyptic: The Politics of Christian Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 66.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Van A. Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer: The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 32.

<sup>18</sup> Rudolf Karl Bultmann, "Ethical and Mystical Religion in Primitive Christianity," *In the Beginnings of Dialectical Theology 1 Vol* (Richmond VA: John Knox, 1968), 221.

<sup>19</sup> Rudolf Karl Bultmann, "Ethical and Mystical Religion in Primitive Christianity," *In the Beginnings of Dialectical Theology 1 Vol* (Richmond VA: John Knox, 1968), 235.

<sup>20</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *The Open Secret: A New Vision for Natural Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 228.

<sup>21</sup> Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (New York: Harper and Row 1968), 311.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> George Pattison, *God and Being: An Enquiry* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2011), 188.

<sup>25</sup> Gustav Kruger, "The Relationship of Biblical Studies to the History of Religious School, with Reference to the Scientific Study of Religion," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 24 (2008) 171-81.

<sup>26</sup> Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament 2 Vols* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), 51.

<sup>27</sup> Roger E. Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology from Reconstruction to Deconstruction* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 327.

<sup>28</sup> Van A. Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1964), 143.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>30</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theology Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 209.

<sup>31</sup> Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *Existence and Faith* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), 55

<sup>32</sup> Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate* (London: S. P. C. K, 1953), 41.

approaches the Biblical text with certain question must come from the idea by which he understands it and get it from his own life experience. Here, the answer will be that the interpreter does not arrive at what the text actually says or the writer truly implies, but he should get what the text means. Thus, the exegetical interpreter molds the text to fit his understanding of the subject. Interestingly, this exegetical procedure is known as hermeneutical circle. Again, it is instructive to know that the hermeneutical circle bears significant resemblance to the Hegelian dialectical method.<sup>33</sup> The dialectical method of Rudolf Karl Bultmann has two sides of an issue. Here, we have the synthesis, and in the synthesis of the two sides into greater whole, and one finds the true meaning. It is quite obvious that Rudolf Bultmann intentionally borrowed from Hegel, but the theologians used the dialectical method effectively and efficiently to help contemporary theology.<sup>34</sup>

Significantly, Rudolf Karl Bultmann indicated that kerygma is an important theology which builds the faith of believers.<sup>35</sup> It is a special event which relates to historical Jesus. Hence, the demythologized method explains the proclamation of the cross, which Christ Jesus himself.

### The Theological Meaning of Kerygma

The Greek kerygma is originated from the ancient Greek word 'keruyma.'<sup>36</sup> The keruyma was used in the New Testament as proclamation (Luke 4:18-19, Rom10:14, Matt 3:1).<sup>37</sup> Significantly, the Greek noun kerygma has 'kerusso' as the verb which implies to cry or proclaim as a herald.<sup>38</sup> According to Rudolf Karl Bultmann, kerygma is derived from the Anglo-Saxon Godspell. Thus, the kerygma in classical Greek is translated as 'euangelion' which implies the good news.<sup>39</sup> The Greek word euangelion is also in connotation with kerygma which implies proclamation or preaching.

The preaching of the cross of Christ especially in the early Church. The word kerygma can be defined as the proclamation of religious truths especially as taught in the Gospel.<sup>40</sup> Kerygma can be defined as the essence and spirit of the Gospel, as in preaching. It is used to express the essence of Jesus as preached by the early Christian to elicit their faith in Christ. Arguably, the content and the message of preaching or

proclamation is dubbed as 'kerugma.'<sup>41</sup> The kerugma portrays the content and message of the proclamation of the gospel. This brings to the Greek word 'kerygmatic.'<sup>42</sup> The kerygmatic denotes the messenger of the gospel. The Greek word 'Apostolos' has a connotation with kerygma. The 'Apostolos' can be translated as a messenger.<sup>43</sup> In literal sense, the apostles can be called bishops. Essentially, the apostles or bishops must be faithful messengers of Christ called and sent to propagate the good news. The believers proclaim the gospel to unbelievers. This is done through their proclamation, the celebration of the sacraments and the governance of the Christian Church.

Kerygma emphasizes the essence and the spirit of the gospel in preaching and the catechesis.<sup>44</sup> In Christian theology, the proclamation of the gospel message and the teaching of the baptismal candidate accepted the cross of the Christ is essential.<sup>45</sup> Interestingly enough, there is a symbiotic and dichotomic relationship exist between kerygma and Didache in the forms of preaching and teaching. Kerygma is the way of preaching and teaching non-believers whereas Didache is the means of teaching people accepted the faith of the cross of Jesus Christ.<sup>46</sup> Proclamation signifies the propagation of God's message. The content of the proclamation and the beginning of every Christian existence lie on Jesus Christ. Pope Francis explains the proclamation as where everything begins with Christ Jesus who died and emancipated humanity from oppression.<sup>47</sup> In effect, the condition for the propagation of God's message rests on witness of Christ.

### Kerygma in Old Testament

Biblically speaking, kerygma is linked to 'kerusso' which means to preach or proclaim or propagate God's message.<sup>48</sup> The kerygma has no occurrence in the Old Testament Bible.<sup>49</sup> Thus, kerygma normally employed in the Old Testament used the connotation of the Greek verb kerusso. The kerygma in the Old Testament is also employed in the context of, to proclaim, announce or preach. According to Gordon Harland, kerygma was core of teachings of Christ in the ancient times.<sup>50</sup> In the Old Testament, the proclamation starts with God himself who gives life and message to humankind. The kerygma is associated with the writings of

<sup>41</sup> Robert W. Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic and Word of God: The Problem of Language in the New Testament and Contemporary Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 179.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 302.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 304.

<sup>46</sup> E. L. Allen, *Christianity and Society* (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1951), 98.

<sup>47</sup> Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 32.

<sup>48</sup> Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), 77.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>50</sup> Gordon Harland, *The Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 226.

<sup>33</sup> Herbert Butterfield, *Christianity and History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), 163.

<sup>34</sup> George Hogarth C. MacGregor, *The Relevance of an Impossible Ideal* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), 72.

<sup>35</sup> Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *Existence and Faith* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), 58.

<sup>36</sup> Carl E. Braaten and Roy A. Harrisville, *Kerygma and History: A Symposium on the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 163.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>38</sup> Clayton Crockett, *A Theology of the Sublime* (London: Routledge, 2001), 267.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>40</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagement with the Secular* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 119.

the Prophet Isaiah as he proclaimed the good message of Christ (Isa 61).<sup>51</sup> Here, John the Baptist, the last prophet announced the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus.

### Kerygma in the New Testament

Theologically speaking, the Greek kerygma is originated from the ancient Greek word ‘*keruyma*.’<sup>52</sup> The *keruyma* has been used in the New Testament as proclamation (Luke 4:18-19, Rom 10:14, Matt 3:1).<sup>53</sup> From John Edward Carnell, Greek noun kerygma has ‘*kerusso*’ as the verb implies to proclaim, disseminate or preach.<sup>54</sup> Essentially, the Greek noun kerygma has occurred nine times in Biblical Testament of new.<sup>55</sup> Most occurrences of kerygma were used by the Apostles Paul. On the other hand, Matthew and Luke used the Greek word kerygma twice and once respectively. Thus, appearances of kerygma in Biblical Testament of New are signified as follows (Rom 10:14, Rom 11:25, Rom 15: 16-17, Col 1:21, 2 Tim 4:17, Titus 1:1-4, Matt 3:1, Luke 4:18-19, Luke 11: 32).<sup>56</sup> Thus, the kerygma is basically the preaching and propagation of everlasting message recorded in the Biblical Testament of New.<sup>57</sup> Kerygma can be used for the public dissemination of God’s message.

Biblically speaking, Jesus Christ himself was a preacher and he started his work in Jerusalem’s temple. Thus, teachings of prophet Isaiah are referred to as the proclamation of the cross of Jesus Christ. The disciples propagated about Christ.<sup>58</sup> Thus, the Apostle Peter disseminated the gospel of Christ to the believers in the later of the first century. The Apostle Peter commenced his public evangelism and won 3,000 and 1,500 respectively during the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-38).<sup>59</sup> Peter was arrested and imprisoned in Rome because of the proclamation of the gospel. Paul preached about the gospel and ready to die for Christ (1 Cor 9:16).<sup>60</sup> According to E. P. Sanders, the Greek word kerygma is to preach the gospel.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>51</sup> William Manson, *Jesus, the Messiah* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), 43.

<sup>52</sup> Rudolf Bultmann and Kundsinn Karl, *From Criticism: Two Essays on New Testament Research* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1934), 317.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Nelson, *The Remnant Study Bible with Ellen G. White Comments* (United States of America: Remnant Publication, 2009), 1344.

<sup>54</sup> John Edward Carnell, *The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960), 84.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 318.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas Nelson, *The Holy Bible* (China: Harper Collins Christian Publishing, 2007), 919.

<sup>57</sup> Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *Essays on Theology* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1955), 125.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 1346.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Nelson, *The Remnant Study Bible with Ellen G. White Comments* (United States of America: Remnant Publication, 2009), 1293.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 1361.

<sup>61</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 49.

He emphatically posited that the preaching of the gospel is foolishness to people whom do not believe in God. The disciples of Jesus Christ fulfilled the good message to the humanity during the New Testament Church era.<sup>62</sup>

More argumentatively, Jesus Christ announced his mission to preach the gospel, when he read the book of the Prophet Isaiah.<sup>63</sup> Thus, the Jesus came to God and he was anointed to proclaim the everlasting message. He preached liberty to vulnerable and healed the sick and oppressed. He proclaimed the everlasting word to redeem the sinners. The kerygma centered on the ability to share the gospel. In effect, kerygma from theologians’ point of view implies the teaching and ministry of Jesus Christ. According to H. P. Owen, kerygma is the age of fulfillment in which the work of Christ and redemption of humanity occurred.<sup>64</sup> Jesus Christ came to save humankind through the sharing of gospel. From Hans Hofmann’s perspective, gospel is meant for correction and edification.<sup>65</sup> Jesus reaches and touches the life of humankind, hence repentant sinner can be saved through the unction of the Holy Spirit.

### Historical and Theological kerygma of Karl Bultmann

Arguably, historical and theological kerygma is an essential concept to be discussed in the Scripture. From Bultmann’ point of view, exegetical method should be employed to interpret the texts in the Bible.<sup>66</sup> Thus, the correct theological approach must be applied when interpreting the Scripture. Significantly, this brings about the method of demythologization applies to the New Testament texts.<sup>67</sup> With this argumentative statement, Rudolf Bultmann revealed his theological concept as kerygma.

From prospective of Rudolf Karl Bultmann, he strongly debated on thatness and not the whatness.<sup>68</sup> For instance, Jesus came to this earth to propagate gospel to save humanity. Here, Rudolf Bultmann was more prescriptive in his statement than descriptive. Rigorously speaking, he focused on demythologization approach. Rudolf Bultmann used the demythologized method to interpret the myths in the Bible.<sup>69</sup> With this method, he emphasized that the preaching of the cross is essential gospel for the followers of Christ. This contributes positively to historical and systematic

<sup>62</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1949), 29.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>64</sup> H. P. Owen, *Revelation and Existence: A Study in the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1957), 181.

<sup>65</sup> Hans Hofmann, *The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1956), 67.

<sup>66</sup> Rudolf Bultmann and Jaspers Karl, *Myth and Christianity: An Inquiry into the Possibility of Religion without Myth* (New York: Noonday Press, 1958), 123.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>68</sup> Kirk R. Macgregor, *Contemporary Theology: An Introduction to Classical, Evangelical, Philosophical and Global Perspectives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 340.

<sup>69</sup> Reginald H. Fuller, *The New Testament in Current Study* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1962), 49.

theology.

Theologically speaking, the historical Jesus in the sense kerygma is translated in German language as “*dass serines Gekommenseins*” which signifies the that of his coming.<sup>70</sup> The “*kerygmatic*,” Christ of faith was what really concerned with the early Church.<sup>71</sup> He construed myth as a form of imagery which transcends the world. Rudolf Karl Bultmann posited that every myth contains truth presented in the kerygma.

Rudolf Karl Bultmann portrayed the saving act of God in Christ as pro liberal theology.<sup>72</sup> He desired to propagate and removed the unnecessary stumbling blocks of proclamation of gospel to the contemporary listeners. He again established the dichotomy between historical Jesus and his faith. Thus, message of historical Jesus of Testament of Old prophets is presupposition to Testament of New theology. The Biblical New Testament covered historical Christ with myth and dogma. According to Friedrich Gogarten, the conviction of Bultmann established his method of Biblical interpretation known as demythologization.<sup>73</sup> The eschatological preaching and the mythological sayings have deeper understanding which concealed under cover of mythology. The mythological conceptions did not help to maintain the deeper meaning. The approach of interpreting the New Testament unraveled the deeper understanding behind mythological conceptions was called demythologizing.<sup>74</sup> According to Rudolf Karl Bultmann, demythologizing the texts in the Bible. He maintained that mythic worldview is distinct from Biblical worldview.

Historically speaking, he postulated that a three-story conception of the universe. This includes the heaven, earth and hell.<sup>75</sup> Hence, a three-story conception of the universe can also be extended to the miracles and forces of Satan and evil spirit. Strictly speaking, Rudolf Karl Bultmann denoted a mythical New Testament as eschatology of Christ as a redeemer and redemption.<sup>76</sup> Against this background, Bultmann did not accept the history of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but he dismissed this idea without any evidence. According to Rudolf Bultmann, Christ’s resurrection is

indication of disciples’ reflection on his message.

Boldly speaking, Rudolf Bultmann unpacked that the believers stripped away the mythical products of the Biblical Testament of New to arrive at propagation. Kerygma is the timeless central message of the cross of Jesus Christ. Ironically speaking, Bultmann’s demythologizing provides an apologetic function and purpose.<sup>77</sup> He emphatically stated that the myths of Christians served as a hindrance that any person must face to become a Christian. From Bultmann idea, Christianity involved a legitimate stumbling block which is the kerygma.

Essentially enough, the kerygma is the word of the cross that requires men and women out of their human made security and inauthentic existence.<sup>78</sup> In line with existentialism, authentic existence concerns with one’s identity and makes decision out of that of identity. However, kerygma is covered over by myth that many people are offended at the myth and never encountered the true stumbling block. Therefore, demythologizing is a hermeneutical approach that starts with the insight that Christian preaching is kerygma. The kerygma is the propagation of the gospel to humankind.<sup>79</sup> In Rudolf Karl Bultmann evaluation, Paul postulated that the commitment to the word of the cross is to know Jesus’ crucifixion (1Cor 2:2).<sup>80</sup> Rudolf Bultmann commended himself to direct unbelievers to Christ. Rudolf Karl Bultmann radically argued that the task of every theologian is to bring the audience of the gospel to the real stumbling block, so that they become true believers of Christ.

According to Roger E. Olson, the Rudolf Bultmann’s understanding of Christian kerygma is that there is no way of salvation authentic existence, apart from God’s grace happened on account of faith in the cross of Jesus.<sup>81</sup> The cross is God’s decisive act of acceptance, and faith is the decision to throw oneself entirely and unreservedly on God of the cross and the trust in Christ’s life, death and resurrection. This results in Rudolf Bultmann’s point of view on kerygma (gospel). Arguably on the other hand, Apostles Paul retorted that the preaching of God’s message leads believers to salvation.<sup>82</sup> Rudolf Karl Bultmann did not mean solely the events occurred at Nazareth. He disproved that the meaningful history could not be equated to the salvation of humankind.

<sup>70</sup> Rudolf Bultmann and Jaspers Karl, *Myth and Christianity: An Inquiry into the Possibility of Religion without Myth* (New York: Noonday Press, 1958), 346.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 352.

<sup>72</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front: Eschatological Reflections on Church, Politics and Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 99.

<sup>73</sup> Friedrich Gogarten, *Demythologizing and History* (London: SCM Press Limited, 1955), 48.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>75</sup> Rudolf Bultmann and Jaspers Karl, *Myth and Christianity: An Inquiry into the Possibility of Religion without Myth* (New York: Noonday Press, 1958), 355.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 361.

<sup>77</sup> Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *History and Eschatology* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1957), 238.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>79</sup> Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 111.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>81</sup> Roger E. Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology from Reconstruction to Deconstruction* (Downers Grove II: InterVarsity, 2013), 329.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.

Rudolf Bultmann rejected all attempts to prove that Jesus' death and resurrection have atoning and forgiving power. He again argued that the meaning of the cross and resurrection are essential than other theological issues.<sup>83</sup> He portrayed that the believers must accept the gospel and preach to hinterland. He posited that the event of kerygma, faith and authentic existence is in no way dependent on the historical knowledge of Jesus' earthly life.<sup>84</sup> Here, he indicated that God acts savingly in the kerygma and the person who hears it with faith. Rudolf Karl Bultmann could not sacrifice the event of the cross as essential for the event of faith and authentic existence. James Smith unraveled that the crucifixion of Jesus happened, but only the eyes of faith could see it as an act of God.<sup>85</sup> For Rudolf Bultmann, the message is important theology for Christians.<sup>86</sup> Thus, cross and resurrection become contemporary experience not past events. In short, neo-orthodoxy or dialectical theology is also kerygmatic theology in different ways, since Bultmann fits here because his whole concern was with kerygma as he understood it.

### The Critiques of Theological Kerygma by Rudolf Karl Bultmann

The twentieth century Biblical theologian, existentialist, Rudolf Karl Bultmann's kerygma has raised a lot of theological scrutiny and misunderstanding. Thus, Rudolf Bultmann proclaimed the cross and the meaning of the resurrection alone.<sup>87</sup> Against this background, Martin Heidegger posited as documented by Geraint V. Jones, asserted that the authentic existence which is mainly backbone of our Christian life, but it is not an automatic element for people to get salvation indicated by Rudolf Bultmann.<sup>88</sup>

From Roger Olson, Karl Barth rigorously debated that the proclamation of the cross is a miracle of God not just a mere preaching of the gospel as elaborated by Bultmann.<sup>89</sup> Rigorously speaking, Karl Barth argued negatively about Rudolf Bultmann's denial of essential things to the gospel most importantly the bodily resurrection of Jesus. The reason being that Jesus died and resurrected in three days' time (1 Cor 6:14, 1 Peter 1:3). Bultmann did not believe in this theology.

<sup>83</sup> David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and its Fashionable Enemies* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2009), 37.

<sup>84</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Text* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 336.

<sup>85</sup> James Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 338.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 324.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

<sup>88</sup> Geraint V. Jones, *Christology and Myth in the New Testament* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961), 62.

<sup>89</sup> Roger E. Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology from Reconstruction to Deconstruction* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 335.

According to Kirk Macgregor, Fritz Buri and Herbert Braun argued radically that Rudolf Bultmann should have demythologized the cross because the whole idea of the act of God is mythological, hence authentic existence is identified through existentialist philosophy.<sup>90</sup> Klaus Bockmuehl, a critic of Rudolf Bultmann asserted that the demythologization of Bultmann took a leap of faith embraced naturalism, alien and a value judgment which did not base on facts and evidence.<sup>91</sup> Hence, demythologized method should not be used to interpret the Scripture. Reinhold Niebuhr also refuted strongly against Bultmann's rejection about the history on kerygma by demonstrating that Jesus Christ is theology of kerygma is the proclamation of the cross which signifies historical event.<sup>92</sup>

Another serious criticism raised against Bultmann is that his interpretation of Christianity leads to a privatized, individualized faith which exempts the social world and its problems. Rudolf Bultmann's existentialist stresses on the corporate and social dimensions of Christian faith. He made the kerygma as the proclamation of the cross as a private affair. He excluded the theology of social gospel. More debatably, his existentialist orientation fosters an inwardness by ignoring the social and political implications of the gospel. Again, Kirk Macgregor's description of the cross and resurrection and for that salvation as an authentic existence did not have link to sanctification, the life of Christian discipleship in the world.<sup>93</sup> Hence, it seems inappropriately to focus on the individual's self-understanding.

Rigorously speaking, I strongly disagree with Rudolf Bultmann on the grounds of neglecting the history of Kerygma and accepted only the meaning of the cross and resurrection, hence his interpretation on salvation is not complete. I again stand against Bultmann's assertion on resurrection in which he indicated that the resurrection cannot be demonstrated and proved scientifically and philosophically, hence the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not biblical and real. But, biblically speaking Jesus died and resurrected on the third day as envisaged in 1 Peter 1:3.<sup>94</sup> I also in doubt of his teaching that there is no way of salvation apart from the grace of God alone. As a result, this happens on account of faith on the cross of Jesus alone without any works. Against this assertion, Christ also needs our good works as Christians as indicated in John 5:24, Romans 1:17 and Philippians 2:12.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Kirk R. Macgregor, *Contemporary Theology: An Introduction to Classical, Evangelical, Philosophical and Global Perspectives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 369.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 343.

<sup>92</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Self and the Dramas of History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 88

<sup>93</sup> Kirk R. Macgregor, *Contemporary Theology: An Introduction to Classical, Evangelical, Philosophical and Global Perspectives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 347.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 1481.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 1406.

on its own. This brought about the prisoner of naturalism on side and existentialism on the other hand.

### The Contribution of Rudolf Karl Bultmann to Christian Theology

Rudolf Karl Bultmann contributed positively to Biblical studies and philosophy. He contributed positively to dialectical method. He brought about demythologization method of explaining the texts in the Bible. He developed in the interest of the philosophy of human’s existence. This philosophical theory posited that the existence of humankind is paramount than any other thing in this world. Essentially enough, he also helped to establish clear meaning about the gospel and redemption of Christ. He finally contributed positively and convincingly to the theology of kerygma which signifies the proclamation or the preaching of the gospel.

#### II. SUMMARY

The Greek word kerygma is very essential in every century of Christianity. Thus, the Christian believers propagate the good news to all humankind. Christ-centered message is foolishness to some people. Against this background, Christ is the message and content of kerygma. Christians preach Christ’s life, birth, ministry, crucifixion, death and resurrection. Here, Christ called both Jews and Gentiles to be his followers to learn about him to gain eternity. The kerygma helps the believers to believe in Christ and his ministry.

#### III. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is instructive to see how Bultmann integrates his philosophical presuppositions, hermeneutics, and kerygma in arriving at his full doctrines of anthropology and soteriology. Bultmann postulated that inauthenticity is precisely what the New Testament means by sin and by speaking of persons as sinners and under the sway of death. The authenticity refers to people who are freed from bondage of sins and death. Thus, salvation is radical openness to the future, namely, a person’s complete recognition that they are a decision maker. Salvation can only be found by grace when a person receives it as a gift. Hence, Bultmann posited that humans are in need of a savior and that authenticity can be realized only through the experience of Jesus Christ.

Rudolf Karl Bultmann posited that we can speak of God and the existence of humans in relation to the cross. People who believe in God want to know who he is and what he is like. Rudolf Bultmann is the ultimate modern theologian who embraced the Christian’s faith with naturalism and rationalism. Thus, everything in the world and in history is subject to reason and this limits the efficacy of religion. He united the Christianity and science for the study of the Scripture. He linked theology closely with existentialism which could speak

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