

Gadamer and Bultmann

(in J. Pokorny and J. Roskovec (Dir.), *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Exegesis*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2002; tr. fr. dans un numéro de *L'Art de comprendre*, à paraître).

Jean Grondin
Université de Montréal

An enigma : a relatively undocumented encounter	2
A common Heideggerian background	7
Gadamer's interpretation of Bultmann : the focus on the notion of self-understanding	15
The debate between Gadamer and Bultmann concerning the role of Christian faith in Biblical hermeneutics.....	21
Does Gadamer do justice to Bultmann's contribution to hermeneutics?.....	25
Bibliography.....	32
1) Gadamer on Bultmann	32
2) Bultmann on Gadamer	32
3) Secondary literature on Bultmann and Gadamer.....	33

Gadamer and Bultmann

Jean Grondin
 Université de Montréal

« In der Tat, wenn ich rückblickend auf die zwanziger Jahre sagen soll, was Marburg damals war, würde der Name Rudolf Bultmann nicht fehlen. »

- Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophische Lehrjahre*, 1977, 14.

An enigma : a relatively undocumented encounter

It is well-known that Gadamer originally intended to entitle his *opus magnum Truth and Method* «*Verstehen und Geschehen* », « Understanding and Event ». ¹ This title is, of course, strikingly reminiscent of the title used by Rudolf Bultmann, for the four-volume collection of his essays ² : « Faith and Understanding » (*Glauben und Verstehen*). Such a proximity would seem to betray the strong ascendancy of Bultmann's hermeneutical thought on Gadamer. Yet, the relation between Bultmann and Gadamer remains somewhat of an enigma and has seldom received careful attention in the otherwise abundant literature on Bultmann or Gadamer, but that rarely deals with both.

Both Gadamer and Bultmann talk a lot about hermeneutics, interpretation, *Verstehen*, Heidegger, but very little, substantially at least, about each other. On the part of Bultmann, this is quite understandable : born in 1884, he is the senior to Gadamer (who was born in 1900), to some (albeit very limited) extent he was his teacher and his main work in the field of

¹ H.-G. Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke* [GW], vol. 10, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1995, 75.

exegetical interpretation was developed in a period in which Gadamer was not such a prominent figure of hermeneutics as he has become for us today. At the time of Bultmann, the main interlocutors of hermeneutics were still Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Heidegger. Nevertheless, the late Bultmann did speak in 1963, in a footnote, of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* as a « highly significant book for theology »³.

Gadamer's relative silence is more intriguing, but also understandable : Gadamer has always kept a distance, a respectful distance, in regard to theology and exegesis as such. He was always aware, naturally, of the theological origins of hermeneutics, evident in the work of Augustine, Melancton, Flacius, Rambach, Schleiermacher and countless others, but he refrained from saying much about a field in which he knew his expertise was limited. In contrast to, say, Paul Ricoeur⁴, there are, to my knowledge, absolutely no studies of Gadamer that are Bible readings or interpretations. References to the Bible are also quite seldom in his work. This rarity, if not total absence, stands in stark contrast to the plentifulness of poetical and philosophical interpretations in his work. One can say that it was the work of art, and not exegesis - as for Bultmann and even Ricoeur - that was the model on which Gadamer's hermeneutics is grounded. Gadamer's distance also stands in contrast to Heidegger's own, although highly complex, attraction to theology. Heidegger repeatedly claimed he had nothing to say to theology, but, as we all know, he constantly did, that is, say things about theology and

² R. Bultmann, *Glauben und Verstehen*, 4 vol., 4th ed. Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1993. The first volume appeared in 1933, the second in 1952, the third in 1961 and the fourth in 1965.

³ See R. Bultmann, « Der Gottesgedanke und der moderne Mensch », in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 60 (1963), in *Glaube und Verstehen*, vol. 4, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1965, 4. Aufl. 1993, 120 : « ...in seinem für den Theologen höchst bedeutsamen Buch ». But, as we will see below, the whole passage reveals that Bultmann is quite critical of Gadamer.

⁴ Compare more recently Paul Ricoeur, *L'Herméneutique biblique*, Paris, Cerf, 2000 and Paul Ricoeur/André LaCocque, *Penser la Bible*, Seuil, 1999.

what should preoccupy it. Gadamer even went as far as to see in Heidegger's entire philosophy something like a theological quest, that is, a search for a language for the religious experience in the age of technology. Heidegger was a constant « God-seeker », he often said⁵. And when he said that, Gadamer did it in order to set himself *apart* from Heidegger. Heidegger was raised in the catholic faith, he was even a candidate for the priesthood before he diverted toward philosophy, but where he still struggled with his deep religious origins (« *Herkunft bleibt Zukunft* », he said of precisely these religious roots in the dialogical part of *Unterwegs zur Sprache*).⁶ Gadamer, by contrast, did not really have a deep religious up-bringing. As I recalled in my biography of Gadamer⁷, he was a nominal protestant, but he received from his father, a renowned pharmaceutical chemist, a scientifically oriented formation, in which the religious dimension was rather low-key. Later on, he discovered that his mother, whom he lost when he was only four, was a more religious person, indeed a pietistically enclined person, but he could not recall any meaningful religious transmission from her. He often lamented it : « what if? » he seemed to ask... By the way, Gadamer also often said, and wrote it somewhere, that if you haven't been taught about the « good lord » (*dem*

⁵ Compare, for instance, his studies on « The Religious Dimension in Heidegger », and « Sein Geist Gott », in *Heideggers Wege*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1983; English Translation by John W. Stanley, *Heidegger's Ways*, Albany, SUNY Press, 1994, as well as the dialogue at the end of the *Gadamer Lesebuch*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1997, 293.

⁶ Cf. M. Heidegger autobiographical confession in volume 66 of his *Gesamtausgabe*, 415 : « *Und wer wollte verkennen, daß auf diesem ganzen bisherigen Weg verschwiegen die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Christentum mitging – eine Auseinandersetzung, die kein aufgegriffenes 'Problem' war und ist, sondern Wahrung der eigensten Herkunft – des Elternhauses, der Heimat und der Jugend – und schmerzliche Ablösung davon in einem. Nur wer so verwurzelt war in einer wirklichen gelebten katholischen Welt, mag etwas von den Notwendigkeiten ahnen, die auf dem bisherigen Weg meines Fragens wie unterirdische Erdstöße wirkten* ».

⁷ Cf. *Hans-Georg Gadamer. Eine Biographie*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1999; english translation : *Hans-Georg Gadamer. A Biography*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2002. Cf. also the recent interview with Gadamer : « *Ethos mondiale et giustizia internazionale. Dialogo a cura die Damiano Canale* », in *Ars Interpretandi* 6 (2001), 6 : « *Io sono protestante, ma soltanto nei limiti in cuo si può dire una cosa simile. Con questo mi riferisco al fatto che io per primo vorrei credere a tuttò che la religione afferma, ma spesso non ci riesco* ».

lieben Gott) in the first three years of your existence, you will never « get it ». He meant it generally, but it can also be read biographically : he did not have the occasion, or the chance, to receive the experience of faith in his early years and then never really could bring himself to it (or be brought to it). To be sure, he certainly had a sense of the importance and ineffable greatness of religious faith, but this sense he gained through the evocative experience of poetry and the work of art. Through poetry, through the transformation it induces in us, we encounter an experience of truth that goes beyond, far beyond the scope of methodical science, but this experience was for him not specifically religious or theological, but artistic. Nevertheless, he did describe this (artistic) experience in terms that frequently sound religious⁸, when he speaks of « transformation » (*Verwandlung*), of encounter (*Begegnung*), of event (*Geschehen*) and so on, but Gadamer never really insisted on these religious undertones as such. Indeed, for him, they were more characteristic of artistic experience, as he discovered it, for instance, in the poetic world of Stefan George, and when he tried to describe it, he resorted to a platonic vocabulary, speaking of « participation », not to a Biblical vocabulary.

So, negatively, Gadamer, despite all appearances to the contrary, is not very near to, nor, quite frankly, really that familiar with theological discourse : he almost never refers to specific passages in Scripture, nor to very specific theological or exegetical debates. He knew that he was very different in this than Heidegger (and, of course, Bultmann). To be sure, Heidegger took pains to stress that philosophy had to be a-theistic, but if one feels the urge to say so, it is, of course, because one believes that one can never be totally a-theistic... Gadamer, for his part, never said philosophy had to be atheistic, because the

⁸ Cf. on this my introduction to Gadamer, in French : *Introduction à Hans-Georg Gadamer*, Cerf, Paris, 1999, 73; in German : *Einführung zu Gadamer*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2000, 63 ff. 71 ff.

question was far less pressing for him. From the point of view of his origins, his interests, his field and his own self-understanding, Gadamer is further removed from theology than Heidegger, however « a-theistic » the latter pledged to be. Gadamer also liked to quote Schleiermacher's dictum according to which hermeneutic *theory* has to arise from hermeneutic *practice*. Gadamer's hermeneutic practice was never the field of theology or exegesis, it was rather philosophy, art and classical philology. In being removed from theology, Gadamer also knew he was quite different from his very good friend in Marburg, Gerhard Krüger. Like Gadamer, Krüger had been a pupil of Nicolai Hartmann, and turned toward Heidegger, but also to Bultmann and his theological circle in Marburg. Gadamer, for his part, did not attend the *theological* seminars of Bultmann in Marburg.⁹ Rather, he took part in Bultmann's « *Graeca* », that is the reading circle that met every Thursday to study the classic texts of the Greeks, the ones that suited Gadamer perfectly as a classical philologist. It was Bultmann who invited him to this reading-group at a time when Gadamer's relation to Heidegger had become quite strained after Heidegger had questioned Gadamer's philosophical future. Bultmann thus played an important role in strengthening Gadamer's self-confidence.¹⁰ Gadamer took part in that circle for fifteen years. But in them he

⁹ His name can not be found, at least, in the (seemingly exhaustive) list of participants published, with the proceedings of Bultmann's seminars, by Bernd Jaspert, *Sachgemässe Exegese. Die Protokolle aus Rudolf Bultmanns Neutestamentlichen Seminaren 1921-1951*, Marburg, N. G. Elwert Verlag, 1996. But Gadamer does allude to a seminar of Bultmann he attended in his GW 7, 1991, 88 (quoted below).

¹⁰ Cf. *Hans-Georg Gadamer. Eine Biographie*, 138. Gadamer's evokes the importance of this invitation in the letter he sent to Bultmann on the occasion of his 90th birthday on August 16, 1974 : « Wer wie ich Ihres 90sten Geburtstages gedenken darf, an dem es gewiß 50 Jahre her sind, daß ich ein häufiger Gast in ihrem Hause wurde, kann ein Gefühl inniger Dankbarkeit nicht unterdrücken, daß ihm eine so lange Dauer einer währenden Gegenwart geschenkt worden ist. Mit der Ermutigung begann es, die die Einladung in Ihre Graeca für mich bedeutete, gerade als mich die tiefsten Zweifel über meine Eignung zur Wissenschaft und zur Philosophie befallen hatten. Seither hat durch viele Jahre, durch Mut und Übermut, durch Ermutigung und Bestätigung Ihr eigenes Dasein und sein Wirkungskreis mir auf

discovered in Bultmann less the theologian, than the passionate humanist, as he frequently stressed himself.¹¹

A common Heideggerian background

Gadamer's relationship to Bultmann does not stem from any *direct* theological interest on Gadamer's part. The interest was sparked, rather, by the presence of Heidegger in Marburg and in Gadamer's universe. Before he knew Heidegger, whom he met for the first time in the summer semester of 1923, Gadamer had not frequented Bultmann, nor his circle during the four years he studied in Marburg from 1919 to 1923 (by the way, chance has it that Bultmann also happened to teach in Breslau from 1916 to 1920, where Gadamer resided and began his studies in the years 1918-1919, but Gadamer

meinen eigenen Wegen geholfen. Und wenn ich denke, daß ich Sie am Schluß sogar einen Ordensbruder nennen darf, dann ist der Tag dieses Gedenkens für mich ein wahrhaft gesegneter. Wenn ich mich in Ihre eigene Lage versetze, wo weiß ich freilich, wie vieles Ihnen auferlegt worden ist - der Abschied von Ihrer Gattin nach so viel Krankheit, der Abschied von so vielen Freunden, zu denen ja auch der uns gemeinsame Gerhard Krüger zählte, das Nachlassen der Kräfte, von dem ich auch die ersten Spuren fühle, die unaufhaltsame Vereinsamung, die das Alter mit sich bringt. Wer will das alles erwägen und ermessen. Und doch ist vieles, was bleibt und immer bleibender wird. Ich meine nicht nur, was jedem Altwerdenden beschieden ist, daß Kindheit und Jugend eine neue Frische der Farben gewinnen und ein geheimes Bündnis stiften, das zu der Generation der Enkel und bald der Urenkel hinübergeht. Ich meine in Ihrem Fall vor allem auch Ihren Beitrag zur Erkenntnis. Das ist nicht nur der mehr oder minder bescheidene Beitrag, den der Forscher zur Wissenschaft beisteuert. Es ist in Ihrem Falle auf eine einzigartige Weise mehr. Die Tagungen der alten Marburger, an denen Sie selbst nicht mehr persönlich teilnehmen können und an denen ich auch nur ein seltener Gast sein konnte, beweisen etwas anderes : daß Ihre Lehre Unzähligen, die im Amt der Seelsorge stehen, eine beständige und gegenwärtige Hilfe bedeutet. Die Diskussionen um die Entmythologisierung, Mißverständnis und Mißgunst, aber auch der Emanzipationsdrang der Jüngeren - all das liegt heute hinter Ihnen, und ich bin mir voll bewußt, daß ich Dankbarkeit und freudiges Gedenken zu Ihrem 90sten Geburtstage mit einer großen Schar anderer teile. Meine Marburger Erinnerungen werden Ihnen etwas davon gesagt haben. Möge Ihr eigener Schatz an Erinnerung, Ahnung und Gegenwart Ihnen Ihren Ehrentag vergolden. » (Bultmann-Archiv, Universität Tübingen)

¹¹ See H.-G. Gadamer, *Philosophische Lehrjahre*, Vittorio Klostermann : Frankfurt a. M. 1977, 36.

did not follow his lectures, nor know of him, during that time). In his early years in Marburg, Gadamer mostly studied with the philosophers Nicolai Hartmann and Paul Natorp. His other interests were in German literature (*Germanistik*) and art history, not in theology. Under the influence of Nicolai Hartmann, Gadamer planned to work on Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* (he had just completed his short Doctoral thesis on Plato's notion of pleasure in 1922). In all likelihood, Hartmann, who was working on a material value ethics, and from that perspective on Aristotle, would have been the natural supervisor of his habilitation's thesis on Aristotle. But in 1922, as is now well-known, Paul Natorp handed him a copy of a manuscript Heidegger had sent him documenting his own studies on Aristotle. Like Paul on the road to Damascus, Gadamer was thoroughly stunned. From that instant on, it was clear that he would become a pupil of Heidegger. As soon as he recovered from his severe polio illness in 1922, he went to Freiburg to study with Heidegger, originally on Aristotle's ethics. But what a semester it turned out to be! He did follow Heidegger's seminar on Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, but in that semester, Heidegger also happened to lecture on the « Hermeneutics of Facticity », a fateful topic for Gadamer, to say the least. But in that semester, Gadamer also followed two other classes of Heidegger : one was a seminar, with Julius Ebbinghaus, on *Kant's Religion within the Limits of Reason alone*, the other was a private seminar on Aristotle's metaphysics. These two seminars are also significant in themselves, even if very little of them is documented to this day. It was certainly Gadamer's first encounter with the theme of religion, that he immediately recognized as dominant in Heidegger's quest. Furthermore, Heidegger's growing insistence on the question of Being pressed upon Gadamer the notion that the issue of ethics, that he had been working on under the guidance of Nicolai Hartmann,

was imbedded in a far-reaching ontological tradition that needed to be sorted out (or « destroyed ») in order to address the urgency of the ethical. In short : there can be no ethics without a destruction of the ontological tradition of metaphysics, in the shadow of which ethics stands. But, and more importantly for our topic, this tradition of metaphysics is intimately entwined with the history of Christian theology : the ethics and metaphysics of the Greeks was profoundly and fatefully transformed by its appropriation by and through the Christian tradition. One could only return to the Greek experience by destroying this judeo-christian appropriation or « contamination ». But the converse is also true, and remains an important task for exegesis : one can only sort out the specificity of Christianity if one can detach it from the Greek conceptuality in which it is couched. Momentous questions, to be sure. But it is Heidegger and the encounter with Heidegger that brought them home for Gadamer. Until then, Gadamer, as far as one can judge, was not fully aware of this interconnection between the Greeks and the bulk of Christian tradition. It was indeed already central in Heidegger's 1922 Natorp-essay, a piece Gadamer found thoroughly brilliant at the time and of which he also later said it was, in his eyes, the best piece Heidegger had ever written. When the piece was finally discovered and published in 1989, Gadamer was asked to write a foreword. He entitled it, as if it were a matter of course : « Heidegger's theological early work » (*Heidegger's theologische Jugendschrift*). The title was, of course, intended as an echo to Dilthey's discovery of « Hegel's theological early writings », edited by Dilthey's pupil, Hermann Nohl, in 1907. But the difference was that Hegel's early writings were openly theological, Hegel being mainly preoccupied with the task of thinking through a popular religion. This is not, or not openly the case with Heidegger's early manuscript, that offers, in reality, a phenomenological interpretation of

Aristotle. Yet, the title « Heidegger's theological early work » is significant for Gadamer himself in that he then discovered the importance of the theological tradition, for Heidegger, but also as such. Upon his return to Marburg with Heidegger in the winter semester of 1923-24, Gadamer was now more aware of the theological question and would begin to follow more closely, more intimately, the developments of dialectical theology in Marburg. This new interest is documented by at least two anecdotes Gadamer evokes in his writings. First, as he became a research assistant of Heidegger in Marburg, Gadamer had the task to find books of Thomas of Aquinas, only to discover that they were thoroughly missing in the seminar library, so new were Heidegger's preoccupations in Marburg!¹² Secondly, at the very beginning of his piece devoted to « The Theology of Marburg »¹³ (in which, by the way, he speaks very little about the theology of Marburg... and a lot about Heidegger!), Gadamer evokes Heidegger's intervention after a conference given by the Barthian theologian Eduard Thurneysen to the « Theological Society of Marburg » on February 20, 1924¹⁴. After Thurneysen's lecture, as Gadamer recalls, Heidegger passionately invoked the radical doubts of Franz Overbeck concerning the very possibility of a theology, adding that it was and remained the task of theology to find the words that would call to faith and help one remain in the faith. This appearance by Heidegger must have made a

¹² See H.-G. Gadamer, « Einzug in Marburg », in G. Neske (Hrsg.), *Erinnerung an Martin Heidegger*, Pfullingen, Neske, 1977, 111.

¹³ « Die Marburger Theologie », in H.-G. Gadamer, GW 3., 197-208 (translated in *Heidegger's Ways*, 29-44). Also evoked in *Philosophische Lehrjahre*, 37.

¹⁴ Compare Thurneysen's own recollection of the encounter in his letter to Karl Barth on the following day (21. 2. 1924), in Karl Barth, Gesamtausgabe, V. Briefe, *Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel*, Band 2, Theologischer Verlag, Zürich, 1974, 228-230, especially 229 : « Der Philosoph Heidegger - sehr zustimmend, es sei *methodisch alles* in Ordnung gewesen, keine Grenze überschritten, aber mit der Frage nach unserem Verhältnis zu *Kant*, den er zu Aristoteles rechne, von dem sich der junge Luther losgesagt habe. Es wurde mir nicht ganz deutlich, von wo aus Heidegger selber denken möchte ». On the impact of the lecture in Marburg, see also E. Stallmann, *Martin Stallmann - Pfarramt zwischen Republik und Führerstaat. Zur Vorgeschichte des Kirchenkampfes in Westfalen*, Bielefeld, Luther-Verlag, 1989, 46.

very strong impact on Gadamer and his understanding of Heidegger's questions. Gadamer attended these theological lectures and knew of Heidegger's friendship and spiritual kinship with Bultmann, but he carefully noted that he himself « could not claim to have been a very competent listener at these encounters - in that it was only later on that he pursued his own theological studies in a deeper manner and learned from Bultmann ». ¹⁵

In what consisted those more profound « theological studies » and what *did* Gadamer learn from Bultmann? There is very little one can rely on to answer this question. First, there is no direct trace or documentation of Gadamer's own « theological studies », besides the rather general recollections in Gadamer's later writings (that are often recollections on the impact of Barth's *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*¹⁶). Out of interest for the hermeneutical question, Gadamer certainly must have followed the developments of dialectical theology through his discussions with Bultmann and Krüger¹⁷, in the *Graeca*, but Gadamer never published any work at the time on dialectical theology, in the vicinity of which his first teaching experience developed. But there are indications that Gadamer must have intensified his « theological studies » after Heidegger left Marburg for Freiburg in 1928¹⁸. He then remained in Marburg for another eleven years,

¹⁵ *Philosophische Lehrjahre*, 37 : « Ich selbst kann nicht beanspruchen, ein kompetenter Zuhörer bei diesen Begegnungen gewesen zu sein - es war erst später, dass ich meine eigenen theologischen Studien vertiefte und von Bultmann lernte ».

¹⁶ Compare GW 2, 101, 125, 391, 481; GW 10, 390.

¹⁷ Compare G. Krüger's study « Dialektische Methode und theologische Exegese. Logische Bemerkungen zu Karl Barths *Römerbrief* », in *Zwischen den Zeiten* (1926), that Gadamer always quoted with appreciation (*Philosophische Lehrjahre*, 224; GW 2, 125; GW 10, 414)

¹⁸ Indirect indications of this can be garnered from a few later recollections of Gadamer. One can be found in his piece of 1985 on « Socrates' Piety of Ignorance » (*Sokrates' Frömmigkeit des Nichtwissens*), GW 7, 1991, 88 : « Als ich ein junger Professor in Marburg an dem Seminar des berühmten Neutestamentlers Rudolf Bultmann teilnahm, der ein verehrter Freund von mir war, erinnere ich mich, dass er an die Studenten die Frage stellte, wie denn 'Der Glaube der Hellenen' [the title of a famous book by the classical philologist Wilamowitz-Moellendorf] eigentlich auf Griechisch wiedergegeben werden müsse. Die Antwort, auf die er wartete, war offenbar *eusebeia*. Alle anderen Antworten der Studenten gefielen ihm nicht. Da schlug ich vor : 'Die Götter Griechenlands' [the title of a book by Walter F. Otto!]. Das fand keine Zustimmung. Ich halte es

until his call to Leipzig in 1939. The master had left for Freiburg, but what remained in Marburg was his « school », which consisted of teachers (*Privatdozenten*) like Gadamer, Gerhard Krüger, Karl Löwith, Erich Frank (who had received Heidegger's chair), but in which a mentor and authority like Bultmann must have played an important role, all the more so after the departure of Heidegger. When he published the first volume of *Glauben and Geschehen* in 1933, Bultmann dedicated it to Heidegger (even if it was not Heidegger's best year...).

Unfortunately, very little is known of Gadamer's relation to Bultmann in those years, but he appears to have remained close to his circle. His talk on « Plato and the Poets » (published in 1934) was originally given on January 24 1934 at the « Society of the Friends of the Humanistic Gymnasium » headed by Bultmann. In later years he regularly took part in the meetings of the « Theological Working-Group of the Ancient Students of Marburg » (*die Theologische Arbeitsgemeinschaft Alter Marburger*) that assembled, every year, the former students of Bultmann.¹⁹ It is also well-known that Gadamer, in the fifties, presented some of the studies that would pave the way toward *Truth and Method* at theological circles marked by Bultmann's school, as if

noch heute für die einzig angemessene Antwort. Damit wollte ich sagen, dass es für die Griechen beim Denken des Göttlichen in erster Linie nicht um das menschliche Verhalten zum Göttlichen geht oder gar um die innerliche Gewissheit des gläubigen Bewusstseins. Sie lebten vollständig nach aussen und waren ganz davon erfüllt, dass die sie umgebende Wirklichkeit von der Gegenwart des Göttlichen belebt ist ». - Another one can be found in the piece on the « *Türmelied* in Goethe's *Faust* » of 1982, GW 9, 122, where Gadamer recalls that it was Bultmann who, around the year 1930, taught him that he would one day learn to appreciate the clarity and natural character of Goethe's poetry.

¹⁹ Cf. the foreword by Berndt Jaspert to his edition of the precious correspondence between Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann (*Karl Barth-Rudolf Bultmann Briefwechsel 1911-1966*, 2nd. ed. Zürich : Theologischer Verlag, 1994, 103 : « Auf Initiative Bultmanns kamen seine ehemaligen Schüler und Schülerinnen gemeinsam mit seinen jeweiligen Promovenden seit 1927 (zum ersten Mal 24.-26.10.1927) alljährlich im Herbst mit ihm und geladenen Referenten zu einer Konferenz zusammen, auf der aktuelle theologische Probleme in Vorträgen und Diskussionen erörtert wurden. Nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg wurde der Kreis von Ernst Fuchs und Günther Bornkamm neu konstituiert als 'Theologische Arbeitsgemeinschaft alter Marburger'. » See also the indications on « Rudolf's Bultmann significance as a teacher » in Edith Stallmann, 1989, 42 ff.

there were an air of familiarity surrounding the school.²⁰ Gadamer contributed twice to volumes honoring Bultmann, first with his piece on « Prometheus and the Tragedy of Culture », which appeared in the Bultmann *Festschrift* of 1949²¹, secondly with his piece on « Martin Heidegger and the Theology of Marburg », which was originally a contribution to the Bultmann *Festschrift* of 1964 on the occasion of his 80th anniversary.²² For his part, Bultmann did not contribute, for whatever reason, to Gadamer's *Festschrift* of 1960, *Die Gegenwart der Griechen*.²³ This is surprising in light of the title of the volume (« The Presence of the Greeks ») and of the fact that Heidegger was himself present with a piece on « Hegel and the Greeks ».

The spiritual kinship between Bultmann and Gadamer was otherwise undoubtable. Both were, intellectually and personally, close to Heidegger and identified, rightly, to his school. Moreover, both shared the same publisher in Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck. The two also had the honor of receiving Germany's highest scholarly distinction, the *Ordre pour le mérite* (Bultmann in 1969, Gadamer in 1971). Both would have dreamt to share this high distinction with Heidegger, but they could never convince their colleagues in the Order to honor the politically infamous Heidegger. There was undoubtedly

²⁰ In those years, the exchange must have been also somewhat reciprocal, even in the absence of a substantial work on the part of Gadamer. Compare for example Bultmann's reference to Gadamer's rather remote book review (on Plato) in the *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* of 1932 (now in GW, vol. 5, 327-331) in the 1949 piece by Bultmann, « Das Christentum als orientalische und abendländische Religion », *Glauben und Verstehen*, vol. 2, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1952, 5. Aufl. 1993, 199.

²¹ « Prometheus und die Tragödie der Kultur », in *Festschrift : Rudolf Bultmann zum 65. Geburtstag*, Stuttgart/Köln : Kohlhammer Verlag, 1949, 74-83, now in GW, vol. 9, 150-161. The piece was originally delivered in 1944 in Dresden. Was it perhaps already then intended for Bultmann's 60th birthday in 1944?

²² *Zeit und Geschichte. Dankesgabe an Rudolf Bultmann zum 80. Geburtstag*, hrsg. von Erich Dinkler, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1964, 479-490, now in GW, 3, 197-208. Bultmann was strangely absent from the *Festschrift* Gadamer edited for Heidegger's 60th birthday (*Anteile: Martin Heidegger zum 60. Geburtstag*, Frankfurt am Main, V. Klostermann, 1950), all the more so since the questions of myth, theology and history were well represented in the volume by authors like W. F. Otto, E. Wolf, K. Löwith, R. Guardini, G. Krüger, F. G. Jünger and E. Jünger.

²³ *Die Gegenwart der Griechen*, edited by Dieter Henrich, Walter Schulz and Karl-Heinz Volkman-Schluck, Tübingen : Mohr Siebeck, 1960. Nor was Bultmann present in the 1970 *Festschrift Hermeneutik und*

a common exchange, a common respect, certainly a profound solidarity and perhaps even a friendship between Gadamer and Bultmann.²⁴

Despite Gadamer's respectful « distance » toward theological questions, it is thus obvious that Bultmann and Gadamer shared a profound common background, rooted in their « heideggerianism » but also in their deep humanism inspired by Greek Antiquity (a humanism that was, of course, viewed with a somewhat more critical eye from Heidegger's own perspective). How can one understand their philosophical or intellectual relationship? I don't think one can speak of any meaningful influence of Gadamer on Bultmann. But is there an influence of Bultmann on Gadamer? It is more likely, but also difficult to address.

Dialektik, but by then, the focus had shifted to the topic of « Hermeneutics and Critique of Ideology », that was certainly more foreign to Bultmann.

²⁴ It is Gadamer who calls Bultmann his friend in the passage already quoted (*ein verehrter Freund von mir*, GW 7, 88). The correspondence between the two (eight letters of Gadamer can be found in the Bultmann Archives at the University of Tübingen) reveals that the relationship was less one of close intimacy than one of collegial admiration and genuine « *Verehrung* ».

Gadamer's interpretation of Bultmann : the focus on the notion of self-understanding

There are no real studies of Bultmann's work in Gadamer's *opus*. By this, I mean scholarly pieces that would analyse in any detail the publications of Bultmann and the literature it generated. Explicit references to Bultmann's work are indeed quite rare in Gadamer. The only piece precisely devoted to Bultmann, the 1961 essay « On the Problem of Self-understanding », contains no single explicit reference to Bultmann's works, only a vague allusion to the essay that sparked the debate surrounding « demythologization ».²⁵

It is Gadamer's contention in this essay, and elsewhere, that the explosive notion of demythologization was widely misunderstood as a notion of modern-day *Aufklärung* that would require that the New Testament be purged of its mythic or mythological elements in order to remain credible for modern man. Gadamer counters this widespread reading by highlighting some « unmodern » aspects of the notion of « self-understanding » (*Selbstverständnis*), to which the study of 1961 was devoted. It is an important study in its own right, since it was, in all likelihood, the first philosophically significant piece Gadamer wrote after *Truth and Method* (in volume II of his *Assembled Works* edition it is indeed the first « Complement », the first *Ergänzung*, to *Truth and Method*). Gadamer claims that the notion of self-understanding is Bultmann's *Grundbegriff* or fundamental concept.²⁶

The thrust of Gadamer's argument is to show that the notion can only be understood in contrast to the *idealistic* notion of self-understanding that would

²⁵ GW 2, 121 (compare GW 10, 390, where it is slightly inexactly referred to as the lecture on « Die Entmythologisierung des Neuen Testaments »). In all likelihood, Gadamer is referring, in both occurrences, to the study of 1941 by R. Bultmann, *Neues Testament und Mythologie. Das Problem der Entmythologisierung der neutestamentlichen Verkündigung*, Nachdruck der 1941 erschienenen Fassung herausgegeben von Eberhard Jüngel, München, Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1985.

correspond to a self-possession (*Selbstbesitz*) of understanding through reflection. « Self-understanding », as Gadamer understands it, is not a mastery of oneself through the transparence of the concept, it is, rather, the experience of the failure (*Scheitern*²⁷) at such a self-mastery in the process of understanding. It is less a conscious process than something that « happens » (*die einem geschieht*²⁸) to oneself in the event of understanding. This is a highly important insight for Gadamer's hermeneutics, as we all know. It is obvious however that Gadamer does not draw any fideistic conclusions from this experience, as did Bultmann. For Bultmann, this impossibility of self-mastery, leads to (or even is) a conversion (*Umkehr*), that happens in the call, or, more precisely, in the hearing of the call of the proclamation.²⁹ Gadamer's focus is not theological, but phenomenological : he insists on the event-character of understanding, that he describes with his own notion of « play »³⁰ as a « being-taken » in an event that overwhelms, as it were, subjectivity and its understanding of its own self. Out of his reservedness in these matters, Gadamer also refrains from stating if the Bultmanian notion of self-understanding corresponds to the true nature of the Christian proclamation. While he would claim this is a « dogmatic » question that concerns the

²⁶ Cf. H.-G. Gadamer and G. Boehm (Hrsg.), *Seminar : Philosophische Hermeneutik*, Frankfurt a. M., Suhrkamp, 1977, Introduction, 36.

²⁷ Compare « Die Marburger Theologie », GW 3, 204 : « Von diesem Ausgangspunkt her explizierte sich Bultmann unter dem Einfluß des Heideggerschen Denkens durch die Begriffe der Uneigentlichkeit und der Eigentlichkeit. Das an die Welt verfallene Dasein, das sich aus dem Verfügbaren versteht, wird zur Umkehr gerufen und erfährt am Scheitern seiner Selbstverfügung die Wendung zur Eigentlichkeit ».

²⁸ GW 2, 125.

²⁹ Compare GW 2, 125 : « Denn nicht ein souveränes Mit-sich-selbst-Vermitteltsein des Selbstbewußtseins, sondern die Erfahrung seiner selbst, die einem geschieht und die im besonderen, theologisch gesehen, im Anruf der Verkündigung geschieht, kann dem Selbstverständnis des Glaubens den falschen Anspruch einer gnostischen Selbstgewißheit nehmen ».

³⁰ GW 2, 126 ff., 129 ff. Compare A. Gethmann-Siefert, A., *Das Verhältnis von Philosophie und Theologie im Denken Martin Heideggers*, Verlag Karl Alber, Freiburg/München, 1974, 189.

Church, he would certainly agree that it is consonant with the Protestant stress on the idea of salvation through faith alone (*Romans* 1, 17).

Whereas the « loss of self-possession (*Verlust des Selbstbesitzes*³¹) » leads to faith for Bultmann, that is to a heeding of the call to authenticity, it leads, for Gadamer, to a better understanding of understanding, that stresses the event-character of understanding (hence the projected title of the work : *Verstehen und Geschehen*, « Understanding and Event »). Understanding is not a mastery of meaning, or of one's self, it is a participation in an event of meaning that transforms us by shattering our self-complacency.³²

From this perspective, Gadamer has no difficulty taking up the notion of *Entmythologisierung*. In his eyes, it is in no way sensational since it only expresses « what was been happening [*geschah!*] in the work of the theologian for a long time », ³³ and, one might add, in *any* event of understanding, to the extent that understanding is nothing but « the formulation of the hermeneutical principle according to which understanding must be a translation in one's own language ». ³⁴ The process of understanding always involves the person that understands and is thus a translation or, if one wishes to phrase it in a provocative manner, a « demythologization ».

Gadamer's only concern is with the reading of this basic hermeneutical requirement in a purely positivistic fashion. Gadamer claims that the notion of

³¹ GW 2, 131; compare GW 2, 406.

³² Again it must be stressed that, for Gadamer, the injunction, « Du mußt Dein Leben ändern » (taken from a poem from Rilke), « you must change your life! » is not characteristic of religious, but of artistic discourse as such (Cf. GW 8, 8; compare my *Einführung zu Gadamer*, 71-72).

³³ GW 2, 121 : « er formulierte nur, was in der exegetischen Arbeit seit langem geschah ».

³⁴ Compare GW 2, 391 : « Für ihn selbst und seine Schüler war dieser Vortrag [on demythologization in 1941] in Wahrheit nur die - vielleicht provokatorisch geratene - Ausarbeitung der Grundsätze seiner von eh und je geübten exegetischen Praxis : eine Formulierung des hermeneutischen Prinzips, daß Verstehen Übersetzen in die eigene Sprache sein muß, wenn es wirklich Verstehen sein soll - ein methodisches, kein dogmatisches Problem, geschweige denn eine Häresie oder Ketzerei. » P. Ricoeur concurs in his « Préface à Bultmann » (1968), in *Le Conflit des interprétations*, Paris, Seuil, 1969, 383 : « en tranchant dans sa lettre, en enlevant ses enveloppes mythologiques, je découvre l'interpellation qui est le sens premier du texte ».

Entmythologisierung was probably incidental and purely occasional (which is certainly debatable).³⁵ According to Gadamer, it even runs counter to the direction of modern *Aufklärung*, in that it calls into question the notion of self-possession and self-transparency. In this, Bultmann would concur with Heidegger's critique of modern subjectivity³⁶ and its claim to a fundamental status. According to Gadamer's reading of Bultmann, and Heidegger, true self-understanding only sets in when subjectivity relinquishes this status. To put it more provocatively : self-understanding happens with the recognition of the impossibility of self-understanding.

In a piece written in the same year (1961), « Hermeneutics and Historicism », a lengthy book-review (*Literaturbericht*), which discusses recent publications on hermeneutics, Gadamer draws a further consequence from this notion of self-understanding, one that was seldom recognized in the debates surrounding his work. If true self-understanding expresses itself in the recognition of the finitude of understanding, this finitude will lead, Gadamer argues, to an opening of one's own horizon. Self-understanding, hermeneutically understood as a critique of one's own self-understanding and of one's assuredness in such understanding, will go hand in hand with a destruction of one's own prejudices. Hermeneutical self-understanding thus promises an overcoming - or, at least, an opening-up - of one's own confinement within one's own prejudices (*Befangenheit in Vorurteilen*). The

³⁵ GW 2, 127 : « Die zufällige und in gewissem Sinne gelegentliche Formulierung des Begriffs der Entmythologisierung, die Bultmann vornahm, in Wahrheit die Summe seiner exegetischen Theologie, hatte alles andere als einen aufklärerischen Sinn. Der Schüler der liberalen historischen Bibelwissenschaft suchte vielmehr in der biblischen Überlieferung das, was sich gegen alle historische Aufklärung behauptet, das, was der eigentliche Träger der Verkündigung, des Kerygmas, ist und den eigentlichen Anruf des Glaubens darstellt ».

³⁶ Compare GW 2, 124 : « die grundsätzliche Kritik am philosophischen Subjektivismus, die mit Heideggers 'Sein und Zeit' einsetzte ».

relevant passage reads in « Hermeneutics and Historicism »³⁷ : « Self-understanding refers to a historical decision and not to something one possesses and controls (*verfügbaren Selbstbesitz*). Bultmann has constantly emphasized this. Hence it is quite wrong to understand Bultmann's concept of pre-understanding as being caught up in prejudices, as a kind of pre-knowledge. This is a purely hermeneutical concept, developed by Bultmann on the basis of Heidegger's analysis of the hermeneutical circle and the general pre-structure of human *Dasein*. It refers to the openness of the horizon of inquiry within which alone understanding is possible, but it does not mean that one's own pre-understanding should not be corrected by the encounter with the work of God (or, indeed, [jg : *a very relevant addition for Gadamer's own understanding of understanding!*] with any other word), On the contrary, the purpose of this concept is to display the movement of understanding as precisely this process of self-correction (*es ist der Sinn dieses Begriffes, die Bewegung des Verstehens als solche Korrektur sichtbar zu machen*). »

This passage is very important since it reveals a feature that is often overlooked in the reception of Gadamer's hermeneutics. The « *Befangenheit* » or confinement in one's own prejudices is commonly viewed as the element Gadamer wishes to emphasize when he suggests that « prejudices » are conditions of understanding (as the title of an important section of *Truth and*

³⁷ « Hermeneutics and Historicism », published as a supplement to the English translation of WM, *Truth and Method*, Second revised edition, translation (quoted here with modifications) by J. Weinsheimer and D. G. Marshall : New York : Crossroad, 1989, 524; GW 2, 406 : « Selbstverständnis soll eine geschichtliche Entscheidung meinen und nicht etwa verfügbaren Selbstbesitz. So hat Bultmann immer wieder betont. Es ist daher ganz abwegig, den Begriff des Vorverständnisses, den Bultmann gebraucht, als Befangenheit in Vorurteile zu verstehen, als eine Art Vorwissen. In Wahrheit handelt es sich um einen rein hermeneutischen Begriff, den Bultmann, durch Heideggers Analyse des hermeneutischen Zirkels und der allgemeinen Vorstruktur des menschlichen Daseins angeregt, ausgebildet hat. Er meint die Öffnung des Fragehorizontes, in dem Verstehen allein möglich ist, aber er meint nicht, daß das eigene Vorverständnis durch die Begegnung mit dem Worte Gottes (wie übrigens mit jedem anderen Wort) nicht korrigiert werden könne. Im Gegenteil, es ist der Sinn dieses Begriffes, die Bewegung des Verstehens als solche Korrektur sichtbar zu machen. »

Method states³⁸). The more subtle notion of *Selbstverständnis*, as it is developed in the two essays of 1961, enables one to correct this one-sided reading. An understanding that is aware of the limits of its own understanding, thus an understanding schooled by hermeneutics, will more readily let itself be challenged by other perspectives. The process of understanding will thus appear as a constant « self-rectification » (in the passage just quoted : *die Bewegung des Verstehens als solche Korrektur*). Of course, one can wonder whether this self-correction can be total and if such a constant self-correction is always possible. This is the very good critical question that an astute commentator, Claus von Bormann, asked Gadamer in 1969 in his piece on « The Ambiguity of Hermeneutic Experience ».³⁹ Is it not the case that effective history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) cuts up what we can recognize as valid and thus limits the scope of our openness?

An excellent question indeed. But it was another debate that Gadamer was preoccupied with and ignited when he discussed Bultmann's notion of self-understanding as a thorough-going self-rectification of understanding. It was alluded to right after the passage just quoted on the movement of understanding as a « constant self-correction » : « One will have to take into account the fact that this 'correction' is a specific one for the case of the call of faith, that is of hermeneutic universality only in its formal structure ».⁴⁰

³⁸ GW 1, 281 : « *Vorurteile als Bedingungen des Verstehens* » (*Truth and Method*, 277).

³⁹ C. von Bormann, « Die Zweideutigkeit der hermeneutischen Erfahrung », in *Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1971, 83-119. The piece originally appeared in the *Philosophische Rundschau* 16 (1969), 92-119, a journal edited by Gadamer. Elsewhere, Gadamer has also recognized the cogency of this criticism by von Bormann (GW 2, 256). Compare my *Einführung zu Gadamer*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2000, 189.

⁴⁰ *Hermeneutik und Historismus*, GW 2, 406 : « Daß diese 'Korrektur' im Falle des Anrufs des Glaubens eine spezifische ist, die nur der Formalstruktur nach von hermeneutischer Allgemeinheit ist, wird zu beachten sein. » (English translation : « Hermeneutics and Historicism », in *Truth and Method*, Second revised edition, New York : Crossroad, 1989, 524).

The debate between Gadamer and Bultmann concerning the role of Christian faith in Biblical hermeneutics

In claiming that the situation of faith is a specific one for hermeneutics, Gadamer raises a contentious issue between him and Bultmann, indeed the only issue concerning which a confrontation between the two thinkers occurred at all.⁴¹ The question was already broached a year earlier in *Truth and Method*, when Gadamer drew inspiration from judicial and theological hermeneutics to stress the applicative element of understanding, i.e. the notion that one cannot understand without applying a meaning to one's own situation, in which or by way of which it is translated.

In spite of this very important solidarity with theological hermeneutics, Gadamer seizes the occasion to *distance* himself from Bultmann on a sensitive issue. In his important essay on « The Problem of Hermeneutics » (1950), Bultmann claimed that « the interpretation of Biblical writings does not stand under different conditions of understanding than does any other literature ». ⁴² One would expect a more secular author like Gadamer to agree with this. But he doesn't, on the grounds that the situation of faith is a specific one. Gadamer finds Bultmann's principle ambiguous (*zweideutig*). It is unproblematic, Gadamer argues, if Bultmann only wants to state that every understanding presupposes a relation to the issue at stake in the text. In Bultmann's words, the presupposition (*Voraussetzung*) of understanding is a living relationship (*Lebensverhältnis*) of the interpret to the *Sache*, the subject matter, that is

⁴¹ It is also the one that was discussed in the only piece specifically devoted to Gadamer and Bultmann in the literature : Th. B. Ommen, « Bultmann and Gadamer : The Role of Faith in Theological Hermeneutics », in *Thought* 59 (1984), 348-359.

⁴² *Glauben und Verstehen*, II, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 1952, 5. Aufl. 1993, 211-235, here 231 : « Die Interpretation der biblischen Schriften unterliegt nicht anderen Bedingungen des Verstehens als jede andere Literatur ». Quoted and discussed in GW 1, 336. It is, to my knowledge, the only explicit reference to a text from Bultmann in Gadamer's opus.

expressed, directly or indirectly, in the text.⁴³ This is a universal presupposition, for Gadamer as for Bultmann. But Gadamer wonders if the situation of Biblical interpretation is not more specific.

Gadamer asks : « We may ask, however, what kind of ‘presupposition’ this is. Is it something that is given with human life itself? Does there exist in every man a prior connection with the truth of divine revelation because man as such is concerned with the question of God? Or must we say that it is first from God - i.e., from faith - that human existence experiences itself as being affected by the question of God? »⁴⁴ According to Gadamer, the notion that one is moved by the question of God, or faith, cannot be universalized, it is specific, and even crucial, for theological hermeneutics as such : « But then the sense of the presupposition implied in the concept of preunderstanding becomes questionable. For then the presupposition would not be valid universally but only from the viewpoint of true faith ».⁴⁵

Gadamer seems to suggest here that a believer will read and interpret the Bible differently than a nonbeliever. Gadamer alludes to the example of the marxist who will see in all religious expressions nothing but the reflections of socio-economic factors.⁴⁶ But Gadamer might also be referring, very discretely, to his own situation as a perhaps sympathetic reader of the Bible, but that is not the situation of the believer that seeks and finds *salvation* in the word of the Bible. Thus, concludes Gadamer, « the existential

⁴³ *Glauben und Verstehen*, II, 217 : « ... daß Voraussetzung des Verstehens das Lebensverhältnis des Interpreten zu der Sache ist, die im Text - direkt oder indirekt - zu Worte kommt ».

⁴⁴ GW 1, 337 : « Nun fragt es sich aber, was hier ‘Voraussetzung’ heißt. Ist sie mit der menschlichen Existenz als solcher gegeben? Besteht ein vorgängiger Sachbezug auf die Wahrheit der göttlichen Offenbarung in jedem Menschen, weil der Mensch als solcher von der Gottesfrage bewegt ist? Oder muß man sagen, daß erst von Gott aus, das heißt, vom Glauben her, die menschliche Existenz sich in diesem Bewegtsein von der Gottesfrage erfährt? »; *Truth and Method*, 331.

⁴⁵ GW 1, 337 : « « Dann aber wird der Sinn von Voraussetzung fraglich, den der Begriff des Vorverständnisses enthält. Diese Voraussetzung gilt offenbar nicht allgemein, sondern nur vom Standpunkt des rechten Glaubens aus »; *Truth and Method*, 331.

preunderstanding that Bultmann presupposes can only be a Christian one ».⁴⁷

Ironically, it is the philosopher who argues here for the specificity of the question of faith, whereas the theologian, Bultmann, insists on the universality of the presunderstanding that is at play in Biblical hermeneutics!

It is interesting to note that Bultmann himself did respond, although rapidly, to Gadamer's criticism in his 1963 essay, where he praises Gadamer's book as a « highly significant book for theology ». Bultmann correctly sums up the point that Gadamer raised against him, when he « called into question that one could speak of a presunderstanding of the Biblical writings that would lie in the fact that human existence is moved by the question of God ».

Bultmann's reply to Gadamer is short, but to the point : « I think that the preunderstanding in question is precisely given in the experience Gadamer calls the 'authentic experience', i.e. the experience through which 'man becomes conscious of his finitude' (339 f.). This experience is not always realized, but it remains as a constant possibility ».⁴⁸ It is revealing to observe

⁴⁶ GW 1, 337; *Truth and Method*, 332.

⁴⁷ *Truth and Method*, 331; GW 1, 337 : « Das existentielle Vorverständnis, von dem Bultmann ausgeht, kann nur selbst ein christliches sein ». See also the remark Gadamer half-jokingly made to Fred Lawrence (related in his essay on « Gadamer, the Hermeneutical Revolution and Theology », in R. Dostal (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, Cambridge, 2002, 190) : « Bultmann forgets that the *books* of the New Testament are not books in the ordinary sense of the term! ». Compare his remark to Riccardo Dottori in his last volume of interviews, published under the title *Die Lektion des Jahrhunderts*, Münster/Hamburg/London, LIT-Verlag, 2002, 83, following which « Bultmann out of sheer insistence on self-reflection doesn't take Revelation seriously anymore » (*wie Bultmann vor lauter Selbstreflexion die Offenbarung nicht mehr ernst nimmt*). As T. B. Ommen rightly argues (1984, 351, 359), Gadamer appears closer to Karl Barth (a point Ott had already made about Heidegger!) than to Bultmann when he insists on the specifically Christian character of Biblical hermeneutics, i.e. the notion that the experience of faith presupposes a divine revelation rather than the opposite. T. B. Ommen, 352 : « The [Bultmanian] emphasis on a wider human setting of preunderstanding undercuts the awareness, in Gadamer's view, that the gospel proclaims an event that transcends human understanding ».

⁴⁸ See R. Bultmann, « Der Gottesgedanke und der moderne Mensch », in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 60 (1963), in *Glaube und Verstehen*, vol. 4, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1965, 4. Aufl. 1993, 120 : « Wenn man überzeugt ist, dass im Grunde jeder Mensch von der Gottesfrage bewegt ist, und dass deshalb die christliche Verkündigung mit einem Vorverständnis rechnen darf, so wird man fragen können, ob sich dieses Vorverständnis nicht gerade auch in der Religiosität verbirgt. Nun hat H.-G. Gadamer in seinem für den Theologen höchst bedeutsamen Buch *Wahrheit und Methode*, 1960, 313 f. (im Zusammenhang des Problems der Hermeneutik) bestritten, dass von einem Vorverständnis für das Verständnis der biblischen Schriften die Rede sein könne, - von einem Vorverständnis nämlich, das in der Bewegtheit der menschlichen Existenz

that Bultmann replies to Gadamer by invoking Gadamer himself, namely what Gadamer calls the true experience, i.e. the consciousness of human finitude. This is the finitude that is implied, Bultmann argues, by his notion of *Vorverständnis* or, as Gadamer would put it, *Selbstverständnis*.

I think Bultmann offers here a useful suggestion that can help bridge the gap between him and Gadamer. The fundamental experience for Bultmann is not a specifically Christian one or the notion of faith as such, it is also the shattering experience of finitude. To put it in Augustine's terms, it is the experience that human existence is and will always remain a question for itself and that it cannot ground itself. This is a truly universal experience.

Gadamer's only issue is whether this need be called the « question of God ». But Bultmann seems to agree with Gadamer, when he invokes Gadamer against Gadamer : perhaps not everyone is moved by the question of God, or faith, but every finite human being remains a question for itself. From this perspective, the question whether the presupposition of Biblical exegesis is the « question of God » can be seen as a mere *Wortstreit*, a quarrel of words.

The real difference lies perhaps elsewhere. Bultmann, following Heidegger, interprets this recognition of finitude as a call to authenticity. Gadamer, even if he speaks, tellingly, in the passage quoted by Bultmann, of « authentic experience » (*eigentliche Erfahrung*) reads this experience somewhat differently. The « authentic experience » for Gadamer lies in the fact that man become aware of his finitude (*seiner Endlichkeit bewusst wird*). That is perhaps not enough for Bultmann (or even the Heidegger of *Being and Time*) : this experience of finitude, however authentic or genuine it is in its

durch die Gottesfrage gegeben ist. Ich meine, dass das Vorverständnis gerade in jener Erfahrung gegeben ist, die Gadamer als die 'eigentliche Erfahrung' bezeichnet, die Erfahrung nämlich, in der 'der Mensch seiner Endlichkeit bewusst wird' (339 f.). Diese Erfahrung ist gewiss nicht stets realisiert, aber sie besteht doch als beständige Möglichkeit ».

own right, must be heard as a call to or toward *authentic* existence. Even if it not totally absent, this dimension doesn't appear to be central in Gadamer's reading. One has often taken notice of this relative disappearance of the « ideal » of authenticity in Gadamer's hermeneutics, that is far less a « hermeneutics of existence », of facticity, than a hermeneutical « phenomenology of understanding », based on the experience of art and the human sciences, as I have argued elsewhere.⁴⁹

In this lies a real difference, but it is one that is overlooked by Gadamer, or Bultmann for that matter. But it is an important one. It also raises the issue as to who is really closer to Heidegger. As we will see, Gadamer would claim that he more justly takes into account the entirety of Heidegger's *Denkweg*. Nevertheless, it is striking that Gadamer leaves aside the issue of authenticity, that is central to Bultmann. To the extent that it is also central to Heidegger's *Being and Time*, one will have to conclude that, on this issue at least, namely the place of authenticity in human existence, Bultmann is much more in tune with Heidegger. It is probable, of course, that Gadamer might be tempted to argue here that it was Heidegger who himself never ceased to be a Christian when he put the issue of authenticity in the forefront, one that should not be heralded as a universal presupposition for hermeneutics.

Does Gadamer do justice to Bultmann's contribution to hermeneutics?

It is on another issue altogether (or perhaps not entirely, as we will see) that I would like to conclude my discussion of Gadamer's relationship to Bultmann. It is the question as to whether Gadamer does justice to Bultmann's

⁴⁹ Cf. my study « Zur Ortsbestimmung der Hermeneutik Gadamer's von Heidegger her », in my recent collection *Von Heidegger zu Gadamer. Unterwegs zur Hermeneutik*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2001, 81-92.

contribution to hermeneutics in general. There is undoubtedly a very great *admiration* on Gadamer's part for the scholarly achievement of Bultmann. In his eulogy or *Nachruf* of 1977, Gadamer repeatedly praised his probity, his *Redlichkeit*, as a scholar. Bultmann always remained for Gadamer a towering, school-building philologist, a monument of scholarly existence.⁵⁰ This admiration was genuine.

But, as we have seen, there are very few studies on Bultmann, or his conception of hermeneutics, in his work. Gadamer never saw in Bultmann a real predecessor on his way to hermeneutics. Indeed, Gadamer even seems, at times, to downplay, or even misconstrue, Bultmann's contribution to hermeneutics. Gadamer was far more inclined to situate Bultmann into the Diltheyian tradition of hermeneutics, one he wished to overcome with his more « Heideggerian » conception of hermeneutics. When he published a reader on hermeneutics with his pupil Gottfried Boehm in 1977, he did publish Bultmann's piece of 1950 on « The Problem of Hermeneutics »⁵¹, but he classified it in the section devoted to the « Dilthey school ». Strangely enough, it wasn't located in the following section devoted to « philosophical hermeneutics » as such, where Gadamer published pieces by Heidegger (paragraphs 31 to 33 of *Being and Time*), Hans Lipps and of himself. One has the impression Gadamer saw in Bultmann more the Diltheyian than the Heideggerian.⁵²

⁵⁰ GW 10, 387-392, specially 388 : « ein Stück vorgelebter Redlichkeit ».

⁵¹ See H.-G. Gadamer/G. Boehm (Hrsg.), *Seminar : Philosophische Hermeneutik*, Frankfurt a. M., Suhrkamp, 1977.

⁵² Also evidenced by the short allusion to Bultmann in the Introduction to the 1977 reader, p. 36 : « Diltheys Wiedererneuerung der romantischen Hermeneutik wurde auch im theologischen Feld aufgenommen, und zwar durch Rudolf Bultmann [!]. Sein kleiner [!] Aufsatz über das Problem der Hermeneutik zeigt freilich bei aller Diltheynachfolge [!], daß die inzwischen durch Heidegger, aber auch indirekt durch die Kritik der dialektischen Theologie am deutschen Idealismus und am Neukantianismus veränderte Problemlage auch innerhalb des Diltheyschen Ansatzes neue Akzente setzte. Der Aufsatz war auch nur ein erster Anfang [!]. »

This is not only unfair because Bultmann, of course, massively acknowledged his debt to Heidegger, but also because he offered a *criticism* of Dilthey in his piece of 1950 that anticipates much of the Dilthey critique Gadamer would himself present in *Truth in Method* in 1960! When he stresses the living-relationship of the interpreter to the truth matter of the text (*das Lebensverhältnis des Interpreten zu der Sache*), he clearly does so in order to counter the emphasis of Schleiermacher and Dilthey on the person of the author, i.e. on the « reproduction of the spiritual processes that took place in the soul of the author » as if understanding would be nothing more than the « transposition in the interior process of creation ». ⁵³ Bultmann also saw very clearly, before Gadamer, that understanding was less a « transposition » than a « participation » in meaning. « One can only understand Plato », Bultmann wrote, « if one philosophizes with him ». ⁵⁴ Bultmann speaks here of a « participatory understanding », *teilnehmendes Verstehen*. ⁵⁵ And for Bultmann, it is, of course, a participation in the possibilities of existence that the text reveals and that I understand out of the fact that I am also stirred by the question of the meaning of my existence. In this, one can clearly see in Bultmann a forerunner of Gadamer's conception of the problem of hermeneutics.

⁵³ « Das Problem der Hermeneutik », in *Glauben und Verstehen*, vol. 2, 215 : « ... Nachvollzug der seelischen Vorgänge, die sich im Autor vollzogen haben », « ... aus der Versetzung in den inneren schöpferischen Vorgang, in dem sie entstanden sind ». This *opposition* to Dilthey was seen more clearly by P. Ricoeur in his « Préface à Bultmann » (1968), in *Le Conflit des interprétations*, Paris, Seuil, 1969, 382 : « Ici Bultmann se retourne contre Dilthey pour qui, comprendre le texte c'est y saisir une expression de la vie; si bien que l'exégète doit pouvoir comprendre l'auteur du texte mieux qu'il ne s'est compris lui-même. Non, dit Bultmann : ce n'est pas la vie de l'auteur qui règle la compréhension, mais l'essence du sens qui vient à expression dans le texte ».

⁵⁴ « Das Problem der Hermeneutik », in *GuV*, 2, 222 : « Die Interpretation philosophischer Texte muß daher, will sie eine echt verstehende sein, selbst von der Frage nach der Wahrheit bewegt sein, d.h. sie kann nur in der Diskussion mit dem Autor vor sich gehen. Platon versteht nur, wer mit ihm philosophiert. »

⁵⁵ « Das Problem der Hermeneutik », in *GuV*, 2, 221.

Bultmann was also an important forerunner in that he was the first to apply, to my knowledge, Heidegger's *existential* conception of understanding⁵⁶ to the traditional questions of hermeneutics, that is the question of text interpretation. It is well-known that Heidegger's hermeneutics of existence departs from the traditional focus of hermeneutics on text interpretation.⁵⁷ Even if Heidegger uses the traditional vocabulary of *Verstehen* (understanding) and *Auslegung* (interpretation), he understands them in an exclusively existential manner, not with regard to text exegesis : *Verstehen* is the way *Dasein* muddles his way through existence by being able to cope (« *sich auf etwas verstehen* »), whereas *Auslegung* is not text interpretation, but the sorting out of the possibilities of existence implied in this understanding of existence, with a view toward their authenticity or inauthenticity. Traditional hermeneutists have often noticed that this marked a break with traditional hermeneutics. Gadamer saw it as his task to bridge the gap between Heidegger's existential hermeneutic and the traditional focus of hermeneutics on text interpretation, as exemplified by the human sciences.⁵⁸ This was indeed Gadamer's immense merit, but the first major thinker to apply existential hermeneutics to text interpretation had indeed been Bultmann.

⁵⁶ Cf. « Das Problem der Hermeneutik », in GuV, 2, 226-7 : « Zu entscheidender Klarheit ist das Problem des Verstehens durch Heideggers Aufweis des Verstehens als eines Existentials gebracht worden und durch seine Analyse der Auslegung als der Ausbildung des Verstehens ». Gadamer would use astonishingly similar formulations to describe his taking-over of Heidegger's notion of understanding. Compare, for instance, GW 1, 440 (the foreword to the 2nd edition of TM) : « Heideggers temporale Analytik des menschlichen Daseins hat, meine ich, überzeugend gezeigt, daß Verstehen nicht eine unter den Verhaltensweisen des Subjektes, sondern die Seinsweise des Daseins selber ist ». Compare GW 1, 264.

⁵⁷ Compare for instance Ben Vedder, *Was ist Hermeneutik ? Ein Weg von der Textdeutung zur Interpretation der Wirklichkeit*, Stuttgart, Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 2000, Kap. V : « Die Faktizität der Hermeneutik. Heideggers Bruch mit der traditionellen Hermeneutik », 95

⁵⁸ Cf. GW 1, 264 : « Von dem Hintergrund einer solchen existenzialen Analyse des Daseins mit all ihren weitreichenden und unausgemessenen Konsequenzen für das Anliegen der Metaphysik nimmt sich der Problembereich der geisteswissenschaftlichen Hermeneutik plötzlich sehr anders aus. Der Herausarbeitung dieser neuen Aspekte des hermeneutischen Problems ist die vorliegende Arbeit [WM] gewidmet ».

As we have seen, Bultmann can even be seen as closer to Heidegger than Gadamer was in that he retains the Heideggerian stress on *authenticity*, that is all but absent in Gadamer's hermeneutics of the human sciences. This understanding of authentic existence is quite prominent in Bultmann's 1950 essay on « The Problem of Hermeneutics » : if understanding is always a « participatory understanding » (*teilnehmendes Verstehen*), it is because it is concerned by the *possibilities of existence* opened up by the text : « they open up to such a participatory understanding the Being of man in its possibilities as its own possibilities of understanding ».⁵⁹ Such a formulation would even be too existential, if not too Heideggerian, for Gadamer. One thing is certain, it is not a formulation of the hermeneutic problem that one can situate in the tradition of Dilthey, but clearly in that of Heidegger.

Gadamer has, of course, his reasons to downplay the Heideggerian character of Bultmann's hermeneutics. He believes, as he at times suggests, that Bultmann remained too close to the (transcendental) conception of understanding that Heidegger presented in *Being and time*, and thus failed to encompass the entirety of Heidegger's itinerary,⁶⁰ that would have permitted him to draw further-reaching theological conclusions. According to Gadamer, Bultmann failed to take into account the thought of the later Heidegger, whom Bultmann always found somewhat mysterious. For Gadamer, it is however a thought that could have been more revealing for theology since it seeks to find a more appropriate language to express the divine. According to Gadamer, it

⁵⁹ « Das Problem der Hermeneutik », in GuV, 2, 221 : « und sie erschließen solchem teilnehmenden Verstehen das menschliche Sein in seinen Möglichkeiten als den eigenen Möglichkeiten des Verstehens. »

⁶⁰ Cf. GW 3, 205 : « Indessen ging Heideggers Denken in die umgekehrte Richtung » [than that of existential interpretation], and GW 10, 391 : « Schwerer wog, dass Heideggers Denken in ganz andere Richtung weiterging. Die erste Exposition der Seinsfrage, die 'Sein und Zeit' gebracht hatte, wurde der Ausgangspunkt einer langen Reihe von Denkversuchen, die jedes anthropologische Verständnis seines ersten großen Werkes desavouierten. Dabei mußte es die Theologie wahrlich interessieren, wie jetzt statt der Eigentlichkeit des

was his pupils (Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling), not Bultmann, who followed more closely the late Heidegger and thus radicalized the hermeneutical problem.⁶¹

It is true that Bultmann always remained faithful to the Heidegger of *Being and Time*. In this work he saluted a neutral and indeed transcendental framework, unfolding the terminology that makes it possible to understand the historicity of human existence, a framework that the theologian could presuppose and use in his existential interpretation. This reception of Heidegger was for Gadamer far too naive. Not only did it presuppose a scholastic sounding « division of labor » between the philosopher and the theologian, it is a transcendental self-understanding that Heidegger himself abandoned in the wake of his *Kehre*. Perhaps it was this naiveté on Bultmann's part that propelled Gadamer to see Bultmann more in the Dilthey tradition and to disregard, to a certain extent, his precious contribution to philosophical hermeneutics.

But one should not forget that in many respects, most notably in the stress on authenticity, Bultmann was closer to Heidegger than Gadamer. From a Bultmannian, and indeed Heideggerian, perspective, it was perhaps the downplaying of this dimension of authentic existence in the work of Gadamer and its highlighting of the specific truth experience of the *human sciences* that was more reminiscent of Dilthey. In conclusion, one could say that if both thinkers, Bultmann and Gadamer, shared an obvious common *Heideggerian*

Daseins Sterbliche und Unsterbliche, Mythos und Sage, Dichtung und Sprache, Hölderlin und die Vorsokratiker das Denken des Denkers beherrschten. Rudolf Bultmann konnte ihm darin nicht folgen. »

⁶¹ GW 2, 430; *Einleitung* of the 1977 reader, p. 36. Ricoeur also faults Bultmann for being less sensitive to the issue of language, « Préface à Bultmann », 387 : « Il est même frappant que Bultmann ne manifeste guère d'exigence à l'égard de ce langage de la foi, alors qu'il s'est montré si soupçonneux à l'égard du langage du mythe ». 391 : « je reprocherai plutôt à Bultmann de n'avoir pas assez suivi le 'chemin' heideggérien, d'avoir pris un raccourci .. »

background, it was not entirely a *common* background, nor perhaps a *common* Heidegger.

Bibliography

1) Gadamer on Bultmann

1960 *Wahrheit und Methode*, GW 1, 336-338.

1961 Zur Problematik des Selbstverständnisses. Ein hermeneutischer Beitrag zur Frage der Entmythologisierung, GW 2, 121-132.

1961 Hermeneutik und Historismus, GW 2, 387-424, insb. 391, 406-410.

1964 Martin Heidegger und die Marburger Theologie, GW 3, 197-208.

1965 Die Kontinuität der Geschichte und der Augenblick der Existenz, GW 2, 133-146.

1968 Klassische und philosophische Hermeneutik, GW 2, 101-102.

1969 Hermeneutik, GW 2, 429-430.

1976 *Philosophische Lehrjahre*, Vittorio Klostermann : Frankfurt a. M. 1977.

1977 Einleitung zu H.-G. Gadamer u. G. Boehm (Hrsg.), *Seminar : Philosophische Hermeneutik*, Frankfurt a. M., Suhrkamp, 1977, 36.

1977 Nachruf auf Rudolf Bultmann, GW 10, 387-392.

1977 Einzug in Marburg, in G. Neske (Hrsg.), *Erinnerung an Martin Heidegger*, Pfullingen, Neske, 109-113.

1982 Das Tümelied in Goethes *Faust*, GW 9, 122.

1983 *Heideggers Wege*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck.

1990 Sokrates' Frömmigkeit des Nichtwissens, GW 7, 88.

2) Bultmann on Gadamer

1949 Das Christentum als orientalische und abendländische Religion, *Glauben und Verstehen*, vol. 2, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1952, 5. Aufl. 1993, 199.

1963 Der Gottesgedanke und der moderne Mensch, in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 60, in *Glaube und Verstehen*, vol. 4, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1965, 4. Aufl. 1993, 120.

3) *Secondary literature on Bultmann and Gadamer*

Betti, E., *Die Hermeneutik als allgemeine Methodik der Geisteswissenschaften*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1962.

Eberhard, P., « The Mediality of our Condition. A Christian Intepretation », in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67 (1999), 411-434.

Fuchs, E., « Aus der Marburger Zeit », in G. Neske (Hrsg.), *Erinnerungen an Martin Heidegger*, Pfullingen, Neske, 1977, 105-108.

Gethmann-Siefert, A., *Das Verhältnis von Philosophie und Theologie im Denken Martin Heideggers*, Verlag Karl Alber, Freiburg/München, 1974.

Grossmann, A., « Zwischen Phänomenologie und Theologie. Heideggers Marburger Religionsgespräche mit Rudolf Bultmann », in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 95 (1998), 37-62.

Grondin, J., *Hans-Georg Gadamer. Eine Biographie*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1999.

..., *Introduction à Hans-Georg Gadamer*, Cerf, Paris, 1999; *Einführung zu Gadamer*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2000.

..., *Von Heidegger zu Gadamer. Unterwegs zur Hermeneutik*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2001.

Hogan, J., « Gadamer and the Hermeneutical Experience », in *Philosophy Today* 20 (1976), 3-12.

Jaspert, B., *Sachgemässe Exegese. Die Protokolle aus Rudolf Bultmanns Neutestamentlichen Seminaren 1921-1951*, Marburg, N. G. Elwert Verlag, 1996.

Jaspert, B. (Hrsg.), *Rudolf Bultmanns Werk und Wirkung*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1984.

Jeanrond, W. G., *Introduction à l'herméneutique théologique*, Paris, Cerf, 1995.

Mörchen, H., « Zur Offenhaltung der Kommunikation zwischen der Theologie Rudolf Bultmanns und dem Denken Martin Heideggers », in B. Jaspert (Hrsg.), *Rudolf Bultmanns Werk und Wirkung*, 1984, 234-252.

Ommen, Th. B., « Bultmann and Gadamer : The Role of Faith in Theological Hermeneutics », in *Thought* 59 (1984), 348-359.

Palmer, R. E., *Hermeneutics. Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer*, Evanston : Northwestern University Press, 1969.

Ricoeur, P., « Préface à Bulmann », in *Le Conflit des interprétations*, Paris, Seuil, 1973, 373-392; « Die Hermeneutik Rudolf Bultmanns », in *Evangelische Theologie* 33 (1973), 457-476.

Stallmann, E., *Martin Stallmann - Pfarramt zwischen Republik und Führerstaat*, Bielefeld, Luther-Verlag, 1989.

Thiselton, A.C., *The Two Horizons. New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer and Wittgenstein*, Exeter, 1980.

Walker, C. R., *The Concept of Self-Understanding in the Hermeneutics of Rudolf Bultmann and Hans-Georg Gadamer*, M.A. thesis, Département de philosophie, Université de Montréal, 2001.