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REVITALIZING MYTH IN THE THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE

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As a community of scholars, the faculty and students of Gustavus Adolphus College have formulated an academic honesty policy and honor code system, which is printed in the *Academic Bulletin* and the *Gustavus Guide*. As a student at Gustavus Adolphus College I agree to uphold the honor code. This means that I will abide by the academic honesty policy, and abide by decisions of the joint student/faculty Honor Board. On my honor, I pledge that I have not given, received, or tolerated others' use of unauthorized aid in completing this work.

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created humankind in his image, in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.¹

This is the story of the creation of humans found in the Bible. It does not attempt to present a comprehensive image of how humans may have developed over the course of centuries. It in no way chronicles societies developing out of groups of humans trying to farm or hunt together. It does say that God created humans, and commissioned them with a special purpose. As time has gone by, how this passage speaks to the faithful has changed, but the story has remained the same. There is a core of meaning to it that is beyond what it literally states.

The Bible is a rich diversity of stories woven into one canon that has a joyful, hopeful message. It offers not only histories of Israel’s relationship with God, but prophecies, Gospels, Apocalyptic writings, songs, poems, and a record of laws. It is a document in which a Christian’s faith life can grow, and in which a Christian’s faith life is rooted. Thinking Christians encounter the world with the stories and myths of the Bible as a foundation of understanding. These stories may shape moral behavior, but also they continue to speak to theology and through theology, to the faithful.

Without theology, these stories can speak only to the limited scope of experiences a Christian might have within their lifetime. Theology allows the shared experiences of Christians through history to speak with myth. Myth alone says a great deal, but requires theology in order to reach through history and help clarify myth to the faithful.

¹ Gen., *NSRV*, 1:26-7.

Rooted in traditions and legacies of previous human ages, the twenty-first century lies open as a field of ideas and innovations yet to be explored. Theology will continue to delve deeply into timely questions. Most interesting in the current century is the theological task of effectively combining faith with reason. Throughout Christian history, there has been debate over what role rationality has informing or questioning faith. Even before Jesus' time, this debate had a place in the religious traditions of Jewish traditions and Zoroastrian traditions and even the traditions of the Hellenic Empire in Greece. The debate has continued on to today.

What is needed is a revitalization of myth and ritual in the theological dialogue. Myths are the stories through which religion is able to communicate the presence of the divine to the modern worshippers. Ritual is a way of enacting mythology on a constant, practical basis, and reminding worshippers of their relationship with the divine. Both of these need to continue to have a place in theology's discussions of what Christians are expected to do in the twenty-first century.

This discussion will define reason primarily as scientific reason. Scientific reason is rational nature that is informed by observation; often further informed by applying the scientific method to processes of observation and calculation. The scientific method explores ideas through the formulation of an hypothesis, testing variables individually, and revising expectations based on results. Reason will be used throughout this discussion to recall the roots of science in philosophical examination. The scientific method grew from a tradition of philosophy. Aristotle tried to use this method for gaining knowledge. For this reason, science and philosophy are closely linked. Science talks in terms of empirical evidence; it formulates ideas using reason.

Reason is also the human's capacity for reflection. It is not the same as science, but it is a necessary aspect of the scientific method. This is more important in the twenty-first century than it has been in prior Christian history because technology has a new pivotal and more dominant role in society. However, science is not the only portion of reason that must be explored in devising a theology. Theology is also a form of reason that humans use to work practically with mythology.

A different and also important concept of reason involves arguments based on pure rationality. Rational arguments focus on logic. Logical arguments like this create a series of statements that have some authority, and use them to set forth ideas about reality. They often employ ideological constructs based only marginally on observation and reality. These constructs are more focused on what they can rhetorically prove. A logical argument need not be based on truth. The factuality of a logical argument is secondary to the functionality of the statements in the progression of the argument. These arguments are interesting, in a very self-contained manner, but they are missing a source that is important in theological work. That source is the mythic and ritual setting of the tradition. These aspects of theology are not required for a rational argument to be made. They are, however, vital elements in the lifeblood of theology.

Faith will be interpreted as the religious person's response to the universe. It is in dialogue with reason. There are many possible subtle shades of definitions of faith, but none need be explored directly in this investigation. Differing meanings of faith are unimportant because there is not one specific meaning necessary for myth and ritual to have a revitalized role in theology. Neither faith nor reason shall be given the status of objective truth or falsehood. While discussing faith, the century in which a specific faith

idea originated will be identified. This allows the discussion to avoid the term modern, which has philosophical meanings in some contexts that are not implied in this discussion.

The following works examined show different examples of specific forms of addressing faith and reason. These works start with arguments made from rationalist sources. These are sources that rely on abstract arguments based in logic. The writings of philosopher Leibniz, biologist Mayr, and philosopher John Haught, will show how the dialogue between faith and reason functions without attention paid to myth and ritual. Several other writings will explain how theories of scientific knowledge work. The anthropologist, Mercia Eliade, and theologian, Rudolph Bultmann, will be introduced later to give a matrix of ideas about myth and ritual that serve to enrich the dialogue between science and religion in a way that allows myth and ritual to enter discussion. Finally, an example of a person who uses both scientific reasoning and mythic and ritual truths is Father Andrew Greeley. Greeley's faith is enriched by his attitude of openness within the context of tradition, which makes him an exemplary prototype for the revitalization of the mythic elements of theology.

What is of primary concern to the discussion of a rational faith is not evangelism. A rational faith is a twenty-first century faith that is able to take scientific observation into account and remain rooted in the traditions of its structure. This kind of faith allows worshippers to remain Christian but listen to scientists. Evangelism is the concern with spreading religious ideas to others, and will be less of a focus in this rational faith. It will become the individual's task to determine how their religious ideas are in dialogue with myth and ritual, and not the task of the religious institution that would evangelize.

Whether or not one can convert twenty-first century Christians to a faith that accepts the findings of scientific reason is interesting, but should not be read as the main intent of this argument. Rather, what matters is rediscovering a format of Christianity that responds most to modern Christian's innermost desires. Desires that belong people who yearn for and seek the truth.

The theological perspective of the mythology helps to answer the question of what a rational faith can expect from a worship experience. Mythology, in this instance, is the complex of stories and ideas that describe relations between the divine and human in ways that allow the religious person to continue to experience the divine. The theological perspective of mythology is theology that takes these stories as the root of how the modern faithful believer is meant to understand how the divine functions in the universe. Eliade and Bultmann, who dealt more directly with myth and ritual, will explore this. Their ideas lead to a position that attempts to find answers outside of the limits of mere evangelism. Again, evangelism is the focus on converting others rather than on reaching a personal understanding of faith.

Many Christians believe that it is important to their faith to evangelize, but when it gets in the way of reaching a personal understanding of faith, then it must be seen as a negative experience. The mythological truths offered by such a position are not the same as the fact claims that both Dawkins (a thinker who will be discussed later) and Jonathan Edwards (the inflammatory author of "Sinners in the Hand of An Angry God") make in other writings. Mythological truths are deep and aesthetic truths that demand a more mature appreciation and understanding from their worship population.

Mythologies, or the stories of belief, and ritual, the enactment of the stories in worship, are tied both to each other and to human life. Myth will not be taken as a dismissive term within the course of the following argument. Myth is the attempt to create a story of the experience of an original, religious phenomenon.² No matter how faithful a Christian is, there is always the historical distance between a Christian and the experience of Jesus living, teaching, and preaching in Jerusalem during the time of the Second Temple. This does not make the experience that the Christian has through myth meaningless; it has a great deal of meaning. The difference is the manner of truth that myths tell; the literal realization of the truth may not be the point. What matters more is the spirit of the experience encapsulated by the myth. If all Christians experienced direct, “altered states of consciousness” experiences, as did Paul, there would be no need for myth. Since not all Christians experience such direct revelations, myth is required for revelation and engagement of the theological imagination to take place. Even Paul told stories beyond his immediate experience:

But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith.³

This passage is not just a simple line of instruction from Paul on how to live. It is more than an ethical mandate, or simple set of moral laws to live by. It is instead Paul’s reaction to his experience of the divine. It provides a narrative of how humans can expect

² Karl Rahner & Herbert Vorgrimler, *Myth*, *Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd. Ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 326-7.

³ Rom. *NSRV*, 3:21-6.

God to work with them towards a future that is planned. Also, it presents an experience of divine love.

But why should one focus on making theology change the way it works?

Theology is the discipline that can bridge this gap between science and faith. Science alone cannot. Science will be examined in this argument. There are some fundamental aspects of science that get in the way of scientists being open about systems of meaning. Haught discusses this in more detail. This leaves theology with the skills and characteristics to allow twenty-first century Christians to understand the world without having to commit apostasy, or turning their backs on God, every time a new scientific breakthrough seems to threaten faith.

Theodicy As A Point of Discussion

Faith and reason come into direct conflict. One theological issue that puts this into peak focus is that of theodicy. The justice of God is a troubling idea to work with. Nature observed with faith shows everything. Nature observed without faith shows evil without the context of good. God appears to be cruel when reason witnesses the death of a child, genocide, or even simple and prolonged streams of bad luck in a person's life. Evil appears to exist in the world, which seems to make God's behavior irrational; or if rational, at the very least, cruel.

In the Bible, the Book of Job says:

Elihu continued and said: "Bear with me a little, and I will show you, for I have yet something to say on God's behalf. I will bring my knowledge from far away, and ascribe righteousness to my Maker. For truly my words are not false; one who is perfect in knowledge is with you. Surely God is mighty and does not despise any; he is mighty in strength of understanding. He does not keep the wicked alive, but gives the afflicted

their right. He does not withdraw his eyes from the righteous, but with kings on the throne he sets them forever and they are exalted.⁴

Even the stories of the Bible present dialogues about the justice of God. Here Elihu, a highly credible agent of the Lord, explains that Job is behaving incorrectly by questioning God's behavior. God has just allowed Satan, his angel, to remove all of the good things in Job's life and leave Job destitute, to prove that the faithful do not keep faith merely because they are rewarded. Here are some of the earliest recorded roots of a human discussion attempting to discern how God works in the world. Unlike Job, modern humans do not get the direct experience of God stating that He is just. In response, theologians try to determine this as best they can, through rationally looking at the universe.

A theologian, and scientist, who dealt with this question in an important manner was G.F.W. Leibniz. Leibniz was a seventeenth-century scholar who had a broad set of interests and ideas, including mathematics, metaphysics, and political intrigue. He discovered calculus, independently of Sir Isaac Newton.

Leibniz made some very interesting arguments that had to do with the dialogue between reason and faith. In *Theodicy* he addressed major questions about the justice of God.⁵ Primary among reasons to discuss Leibniz as an example of faith and reason working together to inform a more coherent and aesthetic whole is Leibniz's importance

⁴ Job, *NSRV*, 36:1-8.

⁵ G.F.W. Leibniz, *Theodicy*, trans. E. M. Huggard (Chicago: Open Court Publishers, 1990). The word "theodicy" appears in this document outside of reference to this specific work. When the term is meant to refer to this work, it will be italicized and capitalized, when the term is meant to refer to concepts of the justice of God outside of Leibniz's construction, the lowercase standard text will be used.

to the role of mathematics totally outside of his role as a philosopher and metaphysician. The argument made in *Theodicy* is based on a complex, almost mathematical, system of understanding the universe that Leibniz created in order to think appropriately of God and the universe in ways he assumed were necessary. In his work, there is also a significant lack of mythical evidence as is needed to maintain an adequate modern address of theological questions. Without the mythical element, the rational argument is trumped by atheistic, science-based, rational arguments.

The most important of concerns addressed by *Theodicy* is the seemingly contradictory state of the universe; namely, it contains cruelty, and is created by God. This state is troubling because God, according to biblical epithets and Christian tradition, is not cruel. This might simply be an attempt of a Christian thinker to make the universe make the kind of sense expected by Christianity, but it does not seem to be this simple. Leibniz believes that a logical universe created by God should be demonstrable.

The distinction which is generally drawn between that which is *above* reason and that which is *against* reason is tolerably in accord with the distinction which has just been made between the two kinds of necessity. For what is contrary to reason is contrary to the absolutely certain and inevitable truths; and what is above reason is in opposition only to what one is wont to experience or understand.⁶

What this means is that there are two kinds of statements that would seem to contradict faith with reason. Just because a thing expected by faith does not match that which everyday experience sees, does not make that thing invalid to consider reasonably. We may consider it as far as reason will let us.

⁶ Leibniz, *Theodicy*, 88.

In order to make this argument, Leibniz felt it necessary first to give special treatment to the details of both faith and reason. He states simply:

Mysteries may be *explained* sufficiently to justify belief in them; but one cannot *comprehend* them, nor give understanding of how they come to pass. Thus even in natural philosophy we explain up to a certain point sundry perceptible qualities, but in an imperfect manner, for we do not comprehend them. Nor is it possible for us, either to prove Mysteries by reason; for all that which can be proved *a priori*, or by pure reason can be comprehended. All that remains for us then, after having believed in the Mysteries by reason of the proofs of the truth of religion (which are called ‘motives of credibility’) is to be able to *uphold* against objections. Without that our belief in them would have no firm foundation; for all that which can be refuted in a sound and conclusive manner cannot but be false.⁷

This passage makes an argument that there must be an underlying attitude that no amount of logic can set in place. One can use reason to make faith more comforting. Reason alone is not an absolute answer definitively because it requires the possibility of negation. Whenever a scientific argument is made, an argument that uses reason in a seemingly pure form, it must provide an answer that can be reversed if the evidence is later found to be false. In order for both science and theology to use reason, they must create systems that can be negated. A portion of this writing by Leibniz is pointing out that absolute skepticism is impractical to work with.

One must, when dealing with theology, look for answers that work within the system, rather than against the system. This may limit the number of outcomes that can occur, but it is necessary to work in the world of observation and not merely in the airy realm of theory and speculation. This may be an overly cautious method of writing theology, but it would appear no less cautious than the manner in which scientists find new answers. This assumption is based on the ideas set forth by Thomas Kuhn.

⁷ *Theodicy*, 76.

Kuhn, a physicist and a philosopher, taught the history of science at Harvard, and then at the University of California Berkeley. He made some claims about the systems of interpretation that science uses is not as apt to change and adapt to new learning as scientists previously thought. According to Kuhn's hypothesis, change happens due to crises in science caused by results that challenge fundamental expectations. Answers that does not correlate with answers that science anticipates are often put down as somehow misperceptions, or irrelevant data.⁸

Kuhn's new ideas about science speak to a difference between theological learning and scientific learning. In order for science to make progress, it is often necessary to defy traditional thinking. Christianity has limits of how much tradition might be defied. While a physicist, such as Einstein, will not cease to be a physicist when he offers new ideas about time, the universe, and mechanics; theologians have a point at which they cease to be theologians. There is a freedom for theologians inside of the tradition, but there are certain points at which what they do ceases to be theology. Rather than call into question what the faith is, they may call into question how the faith may work in the world.

A review of *Theodicy* points out that Leibniz's arguments focus mostly on the relation of evil to the whole system of the universe, rather than the nature of evil as a thing in and of itself.⁹ Modern thinkers and scientists tend to attempt to parse, or divide, things into the smallest units possible in order to make them more manageable. It, in

⁸ Emory University, *Biography of Thomas Kuhn*, <http://www.des.emory.edu/mfp/Kuhnsnap.html>, Accessed 10/25/2007.

⁹ Henry Augustus Pierson Torrey, "The Thêodicêe of Leibnitz, pt 3: Criticism," *Andover Review*, (Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin & Co.) 4 no. 24 (1885): 493.

many cases, may take ideas out of their context. An idea such as evil requires context in order for any intelligible discussion of it to occur. Leibniz believed that evil could be explained rationally, not to dismiss it as just a part of a larger plan, but to free it from being the lynchpin holding many atheistic understandings of evil together.

For example, if Richard Dawkins, a modern, neo-Darwinian, atheist, and biologist were to put forth an understanding of evil, its purpose would be to destroy the understood order of the universe by calling it into question. If God is good, then evil disproves God. This is of course a somewhat unfair simplification of Dawkins' larger arguments, but it holds the main logical points that Dawkins chooses to make.¹⁰ This is an argument that can be made only if one thinks of evil as a variable that can be removed from an equation of proof of God's existence. If the universe can be understood as divided elements, then evil is not necessary. Dawkins' ideas seem to equate evil to a failure of God. He then sees failure on the part of God as reason to dismiss God as non-existent.

If evil, instead of being a variable that can be removed from life, is intrinsic to the working nature of the universe then it may not be held against the universe. Instead, the universe must be understood under the terms of evil. This is not to say that evil is good; it is to say that evil is necessary. If this is the case, as Leibniz states, then Dawkins is making an argument that has no possible application. He is attempting to split the universe into parts that cannot be spoken of separately.

When working with theology, one must hold certain assumptions, otherwise theology ceases to be 'faith seeking understanding' and it becomes an attempt at a

¹⁰ If one wishes to read Dawkins' arguments more specifically, *The God Delusion*, *The Blind Watchmaker*, or *The Selfish Gene* are good examples of his work.

Cartesian explanation of the universe.¹¹ Descartes was a materialist. This is a worldview that sees the universe as best understood as materials acting on one another; the human can be simplified to a kind of mechanism. There are problems even in Descartes's understanding as far as how the mind and body can affect one another, and how matter decomposes or is produced. Still, this is a worldview that affects the modern conversation between rational faiths and science.

Unlike Descartes, Leibniz had no need to create a new system of understanding. He was attempting to put together an understanding of the universe that he saw: a Christian universe ruled by a good God. When one is thinking through Christian theology it is not to undermine the principles of what it is to be Christian; it is to understand what those principles mean in the universe. The task is never to prove the existence of God, as Descartes tried to do. The task of Christian theology is to understand how a God that exists, can be shown working in the world.

Returning to Leibniz's contextual description of evil, one can understand evil as serving a purpose.¹² Harmony requires disparate elements. There must be evil that there might be good. This is an argument that can be gleaned from Leibniz's work, but is more appropriately attributed to the critic Torrey.¹³ Evil has a more concrete definition, when

¹¹ The term Cartesian, as the dictionary will confirm, refers to ideas belonging to the philosopher René Descartes. Descartes was famous for attempting to logically prove the existence of God. Some refer to him as the father of contemporary scientific reasoning. Descartes' emphasized skeptical, rational thought. His skepticism is what we recall largely now.

¹² Torrey, 493.

¹³ Ibid., 494.

understood in context of good, evil is the lie to which good is the truth.¹⁴ This is a logically satisfactory answer to the question, still a bit aesthetically difficult to deal with if one thinks of evil not in terms of generalities but in specific, eventual terms.

Is this definition, one might ask, sufficient to explain human behavior? Is this a definition that only satisfies arguments against natural evil? One must dive further into Leibniz to understand human nature in order to understand what constitutes human evil. Leibniz himself must have felt this explanation sufficient to explain natural evils, as Leibniz was well aware of the devastation that could be caused by natural events such as the Lisbon earthquake.¹⁵

As for human nature, God has provided humans with a rational faculty that, when everything is working properly, allows a human to distinguish between good and evil. This is Jack Davidson's understanding of Leibniz's ideas and theories. Humans have the freedom to choose their course of action. Sin, and specifically sin as the mistaken grasping for that which is evil, is a problem of mistaken rationality. Humans have a desire to choose the good.¹⁶ Unfortunately humans function with more than reason alone.

¹⁴ Torrey, 494.

¹⁵ The Lisbon earthquake devastated the Portuguese capital in 1755. This physical event inspired many of Leibniz's contemporaries to discuss whether or not God was fair. The scale of destruction was epically great, and wrecked not just the people, but the city itself.

¹⁶ Jack D. Davidson, "Video Meliora Proboque, Deteriora Sequor: Leibniz on the Intellectual Source of Sin," in *Leibniz: Nature and Freedom*, ed. Donald Rutherford and J.A. Cover (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005): 236.

Humans have passions that get in the way of the God-given rational process.¹⁷ These convince humans that the wrong moral choice is the right moral choice.

If humans are this rational, then God does not limit humanity to an exactly calculated set of actions, counteractions, and circumstances. God allows for freedom, and the possibility of evil. The God discussed in Leibniz created the universe to be best because it had the best series of possibilities that end, as God as seen, in an overall series of good events.

There are some things that are left out of Leibniz's understanding of the universe. Most importantly, there appears to be no real discussion of an ecclesial body that transmits the Christian understanding of the universe. An ecclesial body is some kind of structure that uses myth and ritual to transmit spiritual truths. While it may be possible for the individual Christian to work many things out on their own, they still require an institution. If not a formal one, then one composed of family members teaching the stories and enacting the rituals. In order to continue discussion in the modern age, there should be some form of regulating body for Christianity.

This is an important, and historical, distinction between the twenty-first century theological climate and the seventeenth-century, European theological climate. No longer is Christianity the only accepted set of religious ideas, at least not to the extent it was in seventeenth-century Europe. Instead of Christendom, some kind of imperial faith, we have a separation between the governments of predominantly Christian nations and the ecclesial bodies that take care of them. The seventeenth-century theological climate was

¹⁷ Davidson, 236-37.

one of unity working within the Christian context.¹⁸ The twenty-first century must place itself into a pluralistic world, where the Christian faith is not the only one being preached or used to reach understanding. The theologian, John Haught, explains to us how we can take modern social and scientific understandings seriously when tackling a modern theological approach to the relationship between faith and reason.

John Haught and a Position of Engagement

There are many thinkers who have dealt with faith and reason, and many who have attempted to solve or outline questions of theodicy, or the justice of God. John Haught is a twenty-first century voice that chooses some specific problems posed by neo-Darwinian thinkers and by many fundamentalist responses to neo-Darwinian ideas. His articulation is an excellent example of how a thinker with more detailed equipment for observation than Leibniz had can make sense of both scientific and theological answers. His writing engages Leibniz as a result of the problem of suffering.¹⁹

John Haught does not directly address the question of theodicy as Leibniz does. He does outline rational faith in the context of scientific thinking that might be used to overturn Leibniz's closed system. Haught describes some of the modern lines of both scientific and theological thinking that interact with Leibniz's initial treatment of the

¹⁸ This is not to imply that the seventeenth-century was some kind of unquestioning Christian hegemony. Many ideas were uncovered that were in contrast with one another, but their context was unified. Even if seventeenth-century thinkers were discussing something like 'natural religion' it would be within a Christian context.

¹⁹ John Haught, *God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 22.

problem of theodicy. The most specific modern argument, or discovery, that makes the question of theodicy difficult is that of evolution.

Specifically, neo-Darwinian ideas make religious truth seem not credible to the mind and are more sympathetic to scientific answers. Neo-Darwinianism is Darwin's theory with twenty-first century biochemical evidence for how evolution is working.²⁰ If people were aware of the problem of suffering in Leibniz's time, they are even more aware of the scope of suffering through the theory of evolution.²¹ Suffering, in terms of evolution, is no longer the individual facing things that seem unfair or cruel, but all of creation caught in a seemingly meaningless trap of random chance and unfortunate circumstance.

Haught quotes the former evangelical Christian turned radical atheist, A. J. Mattill, Jr:

Could an Almighty God of love have designed, foreseen, planned and created a system whose law is a ruthless struggle for existence in an over-crowded world? Could an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent [*sic.*] God have devised such a cold-blooded competition of beast with beast, beast with man, man with man, species with species in which the clever cunning and the cruel survive?

... Would a benevolent God have created animals to devour others when he could have designed them all as vegetarians? What kind of deity would have designed the beaks which [*sic.*] rip sensitive flesh? What God would intend every leaf, blade of grass, and drop of water to be a battle ground [*sic.*] in which living organisms pursue, capture, kill and eat one another? What God would design creatures to prey upon one another and, at the same time, instill into such creatures a capacity for intense pain and suffering?²²

²⁰ Haught, *God After Darwin*, 13.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

²² A. J. Mattill Jr., *The Seven Mighty Blows to Traditional Beliefs*, 2nd ed. (Gordo, AL: The Flatwoods Press, 1995), 32. cited by John Haught, *God After Darwin*, 23.

The problem of theodicy is much more intense than one could imagine in previous human history. Darwin's theory of evolution has ramifications of implying that every creature or plant that has lived or is alive currently has gone through an immensely cruel, unintelligible process. This seems to make the absolute injustice of God necessary for God to exist. If this is the truth, then Leibniz's estimation of evil, God, and so forth, is wrong. Additionally, much of Christian theology is flawed to the point where it would not be relevant any longer.

Haught's primary concern is not theodicy. His concern is a position of engagement between Christianity and evolution. Arguments made by neo-Darwinian thinkers, who wish to dismiss theology and Christianity, tend to use evil as an excuse to dismiss any theological discussion of reality. This allows arguments made for a position of 'engagement' to engage the older, metaphysical concerns and arguments of Leibniz.

The question that matters most to Haught is the question of how theology is affected by new scientific understanding. The battle happening in the twenty-first century is how theology can remain relevant in the face objective scientific truth. Also, for some thinkers, Darwin's explanations of the universe seem to be sufficient to explain how the universe has come to where it is.²³ An infinite amount of time and an infinite amount of random variation are sufficient, they think, to explain the diversity and complexity of life on earth. This is not a world of thought that Haught wishes to work within.

²³ Haught, *God After Darwin*, 61.

Haught calls the thinkers that work in this idea “scientific materialists”.²⁴ They have an idea there is an underlying purposelessness to the universe that determines the findings of science. This idea is not based on any rational evidence. Rather it is assumed in the arguments made by Neo-Darwinian evolutionary theorists. It is the well from which many neo-Darwinian arguments about evolution are drawn. They are coupling a metaphysics with evolution in a way that makes dialogue between ideas about evolution and any kind of theism impossible.²⁵ To put it another way, the materialist way of thinking precedes any ideas that evolution led them to; such as the meaningless nature of the universe, or the random nature of the universe.

Even Leibniz, years before Darwin, thought that an idea such as ‘intelligent design’ was impractical. Haught states that a good evolutionary theology,

Does not search for definitive footprints of the divine in nature...
Evolutionary theology seeks to show how our new awareness of cosmic
and biological evolution can enhance and enrich traditional teachings
about God and God’s way of acting in the world.²⁶

The problem is that much theological work has sought in natural science proof of God’s existence. Instead, Haught suggests working in a manner that is more sympathetic to God’s existence. Leibniz came to similar conclusions. Overly simple explanations of how the universe could be proved to be working in concordance with God’s providence made by others were insufficient for him. Pierre Bayle, to whom much of the *Theodicy* is addressed, wanted to put limits on how God could be understood to be working in the universe. Bayle also believed that reason was incapable of understanding faith.

²⁴ *God After Darwin*, 27.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

In *Theodicy* Leibniz addressed this concern of Bayle:

In order to explain this marvel of the formation of animals, I made use of a Pre-established Harmony [*sic.*], that is to say, of the same means I had used to explain another marvel, namely the correspondence of soul with body, wherein I proved the uniformity and the fecundity of the principles I had employed....[Bayle] was not yet disposed to believe that God, with all his power over Nature [*sic.*] and with all the foreknowledge which he has of the contingencies that may arrive, could have so disposed things that by the laws of mechanics alone a vessel (for instance) should go to its port of destination without being steered during its passage by an intelligent guide. I was surprised to see that limits were placed on the power of God, without the adduction of any proof and without indication that there was any contradiction to be feared on the side of the object or any imperfection on God's side.²⁷

This is most certainly not a direct argument against “intelligent design.” The argument does suggest a belief that God could work within a system without the specific planning involved. Leibniz makes a case for God arranging a universe having the concept of “possibility.” Evolution is no longer limited to an exact plan by a “grand watchmaker” but a level of possibilities of successes and failures. Unfortunately, Leibniz based this argument entirely in his rational abstraction of the universe. Scripture and Christian stories are used primarily to proof-text specific points in the arguments, rather than entering into dialogue with theological ideas. The idea of the infinite nature of God is an example of a very reduced form of mythical truth.

Haught seeks to create a theological position that is much more capable of dealing with mythology and story than has previously existed in regard to evolutionary theory. Modern human understanding of the universe has changed because of the findings of evolution. What needs to be done now is to work within the mythology to find how the message speaks to us now that our worldview has changed. The twenty-first century will

²⁷ Leibniz, *Theodicy*, 63-64.

never have the same understanding of creation that the biblical authors had.²⁸ Instead, there is an understanding that creation is a constant process.²⁹ The position of engagement set forth by Haught is a position of understanding how humans think about theology in the light of evolution.

It is not enough for Christians to re-define their understanding of science based solely on scripture. Haught states:

Obviously an evolutionary understanding of life cannot be reconciled in a literal sense with the story of a primordial couple, Adam and Eve, rebelling against God in the Garden of Eden and passing down the consequences of their disobedience through our genetic history. The science of evolution cannot and should not be made to conform literally to the mythic biblical accounts and vice versa. To resort to this artifice would be in fact to miss any deeper meanings resident in the sacred stories.³⁰

So the myths of Christianity still have things to say, but what they say should not limit our understanding of the universe. Engagement means taking the stories of the bible seriously and taking the findings of science seriously. This requires mental effort in order to avoid reaching simplistic answers that exclude one or the other.

What is left to be done after deep engagement with evolutionary theory and theology is largely up to either the individual or the theologian writing for a specific Christian tradition. It requires action on the part of the reader to determine how the stories that form their vision of Christianity will be affected by evolution. Haught's outline of the position of "engagement" will re-define purposes of human life explored first in Genesis:

²⁸ *God After Darwin*, 40.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 146.

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living things that moves upon the earth.” God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.” And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.³¹

If evolution can relate to any part of our mythology, it can teach us what it means to have dominion over the animals, and plants. It can give Christians new depths of meaning for these ancient terms recorded in Genesis. Evolution will allow us better to understand our relationship with God’s creation in terms that the kind and compassionate God wanted us to understand. Haught set forth a process by which modern Humans can begin to understand both scientifically and theologically.

How Does Reason Mean Through Science?

It may be vital to pause a moment and examine reason through the lens of the scientific method. The philosophy of science is worth discussing in order to find further common ground between scientific research and theological research, and in order to understand better some of the common roots of conflict and disparity between faith and reason. First, a discussion of what the scientific method is will be beneficial. Several philosophers of science provide answers.

Paul Horwich discusses, in his work *Probability and evidence* [sic.], a detailed explanation of the scientific method. Horwich is an analytical philosopher and a professor at New York University. His work, as an analytic philosopher, tends to combine

³¹ Gen. *NSRV*, 1:28-31.

traditional philosophical methods of logic with a respect for the natural sciences. He discusses the scientific method's concern with evidence. His goal is to resolve some paradoxes within the scientific method and attain a better understanding of the method.³² The chief role of the scientific method is to create and test hypotheses about the world that can allow knowledge about the world to grow and expand.

Holmes Rolston III is a respected philosophy professor at Colorado State University. His writings concern the dialogue between science and reason. He not only discusses how science determines meaning and truth, but also what room is left for religion within science. He compares the disciplines of theology and science. This is not an exact, but an interesting way of framing a question of reason and faith.

Scientist and theologian alike seek what is called universal intent, a setting aside of private interests so as to promote the single-minded discovery of public truth, what is true at large and for all persons.³³

There is an attempt to divine a larger set of answers in both science and theology. That may seem obvious, but it is worth re-stating. Often it is easy for one discipline to call the other short-sighted, while not bearing in mind how much the two have in common in terms of motivation. Importantly, science serves the same task of dispelling anthropocentrism that theology serves.³⁴ This anthropocentrism is a mistaken focus on the human as the center of importance for the entire world. Science seeks to put humans in their place most often by comparing them to their primate ancestors. Theology seeks to

³² Paul Horwich, *Probability and evidence* [sic.], (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 1.

³³ Holmes Rolston III, *Science and Religion*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1987), 17.

³⁴ Ibid., 17.

put humans into perspective with the motivation behind creation, most often couched in terms of God.

This differs from some accounts of science presented by other thinkers. Rolston does not take into account this difference because he is a philosopher and not a theologian tied to a tradition. Rolston is not specifically religious. There is no account of traditional truths to which humanity is subject. Rolston assumes the individual will determine their meaning. For Christians there is an experience of being subject to a self-emptying and loving God. The loving is the *kenosis*, or self-emptying love experienced by Christians in the experience of Jesus' life and ministry.³⁵ For scientists there seems to be, instead, a sense of mechanism and motion that goes beyond the human scope. The human is a part of something larger, but that largeness is not guaranteed to be compassionate as it is for Christians.

Rolston takes into account the active involvement of the researcher in the sciences.³⁶ This is implicitly an acceptance of Kuhn's hypothesis of the social origins of accepted scientific truths. Even scientists, Rolston states, are looking for answers rather than observing them. This has interesting consequences. If this is the case, then no longer are the goals of scientists and theologians so very different. There is still a lack of mythical clarity, but there is an underlying driving purpose to the work outside of clinical sterility. There is a life to the questions being asked that makes one pause and take both

³⁵ Haught, *God After Darwin*, 53-4.

³⁶ Rolston, *Science and Religion*, 19.

fields seriously as interpretive fields. Science has potential to work along with theology in joy. Theology can bring joy, only with the mythical promises.

William Austin, a systematic philosopher, discusses rational credibility. Rational credibility the manner in which arguments based on reason are made determines their authority. What is interesting about the article that Austin wrote is the change in credibility that is happening as evolution is further discussed. He cites the hypothesis of Edward O. Wilson', a sociobiologist, that sociobiology seeks a causal explanation for religion. Sociobiology is a field of biology that attempts to find the evolutionary roots of social functions. The idea is that anything in human behavior has its roots in evolutionary culture.³⁷ The problem with assuming that religion's answers are incomplete compared to science's answers is that the credibility of science is just as suspect. To make this point, Austin cites Mary Hesse's work that challenges the purity of the answers that science finds. If religious answers are socially based, then, it must follow that scientific answers are as socially based. This means that an attack on religion that is based on the cultural nature of theology is invalid, for the same critique could be leveled at science.³⁸

He states his argument simply:

No one can hold all his [*sic.*] beliefs on the basis of evidence, for then there would be no propositions to serve as evidence-statements. Within each person's corpus of beliefs there must be some basic beliefs, held not on the basis of evidence but because they seem so solid, inescapable, luminously certain, or the like. They constitute his [*sic.*] ultimate set of evidence-statement, against which non-basic candidates for belief are assessed.³⁹

³⁷ William H. Austin. "Rational Credibility and Causal Explanations of Belief, *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, 26 no 2 1984, 116.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.

There is a set of information that holds credibility for people for no more real reason than it is essential to the milieu of their beliefs.

Mayr and a Philosophy of Biology

Ernst Mayr was a Professor at Harvard University, and made major contributions to various forms of biology throughout the twentieth century. His book, *What Makes Biology Unique?*, is a compilation of essays and ideas published on Mayr's hundredth birthday.⁴⁰ Mayr's point was that previous philosophers of science have conceived the philosophy of biology inaccurately and unfairly. He seeks not to point towards a totally comprehensive philosophy of biology, but to point out where other considerations of biology may fall short.⁴¹

Early on, Mayr's first concern is to prove that biology is in fact the science that it claims to be. While it may not seem to be a matter of controversy that biology is a science, the manner in which biology is documented is, and has been, quite different from the manner in which other sciences are done. Early biology was not recognized as a science because it involved little in the way of mathematics, and relied on different types of observation and evidence when compared to sciences such as physics or chemistry.

³⁹ Austin, *Rational credibility*, 122.

⁴⁰ Ernst Mayr, *What Makes Biology Unique?* (Cambridge :Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁴¹ Ibid., 14-17.

The nature of biology, moreover, is quite different from that of physics. Physics relies on laws that can be disproved and calculated in the universe, Biology has comparatively fewer laws, and relies instead on a moving, animate world.

What Mayr leaves out, and understandably so, is the possibility of tradition informing biology. The observations are supposedly pure observations, and not influenced by the history out of which they arise, and the pattern of ideas that caused the questions to be asked in the first place. Vitalism is what Mayr sees the scope of theology covering, and he thinks vitalism is an error.⁴² Vitalism is a line of thought that attempted to move beyond a mechanistic understanding of the universe which was not sufficient to describe re-generation and reproduction.⁴³ Vitalism stated that there was an invisible force that could not be seen, but could explain away problems. Religion resembles that because it similarly relies on that which cannot be observed in order to explain that which is observed.

The Interaction of Myths and Reason

Human understanding changes all the time. Christian theology, as an extension of specific human understanding is no exception. Science is an extension of reason. Creating verifiable experiments in order to have factual understanding of the world around us is its job. The scientific method requires answers that can later be changed if evidence requires it. This is related to theology's answers. How those answers are understood can change. The answers themselves remain consistent. It provides none of the meaning that humans

⁴² *What Makes Biology Unique?*, 22.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 23.

expect out of the universe, but can give us a great idea of how the observable universe works. Christianity has more than just reason, because it participates in a mythology.⁴⁴

The mythology is the immortal aspect of a Christian's understanding of the universe. The theology that is created to make sense of reason's observations, or science in the consistent terms of the mythology does change over time. This does not lessen the importance or the relevance of theology, but it does change what manner of information is sought through it. The understanding sought by theology has never meant to be an overtly authoritative understanding. It is meant to be the realization of how the universe is meant to be working. In other words, it is the human attempt at grasping the working order of the universe.

Rather than ignoring scientific answer in order to protect Christian mythology, there must be engagement on all levels of theology. Science has allowed humans to make important changes in culture and society based on its findings. This progress should not be avoided because of fears that old definitions will be re-considered. Evolution redefines how the deeper truths behind the mythology speak. This is amplified as time puts distance between the progenitors of the myth and the twentieth-first century. Twenty-first century Christians, and Christians in the future, will continue to need new ways of looking at the universe to live fully in the world. A way of reaching an understanding of how some thinkers have moved beyond fundamentalism is to examine Rudolf Bultmann and Mercia Eliade. Those two thinkers had different intents; Bultmann was interested in

⁴⁴ The term mythology here is not used in the pejorative sense. The word is meant to reflect a story that has a truth greater than factual understanding. An alternative, although not strong enough, term would be storytelling.

interpreting the historical message of Jesus, and Eliade was more concerned with the historical roots of the origin of religion in general.

A reviewer described Eliade as someone who achieved an understanding of mythology that was ‘aesthetic’.⁴⁵ What the reviewer, Calinescu, means by aesthetic is an understanding informed by a broad worldview that looks at a multiplicity of mythologies.⁴⁶ This point of view does not negate its relevance to a more stable tradition such as Christianity.⁴⁷ The interest in other faiths is an interest that takes faith as a concept more seriously. This is in direct opposition to the status assigned to religion by Mayr and Dawkins. Rather than taking many religions seriously, they make arguments specifically against Christianity. The increased number of religions considered, in the case of Eliade, is flattering to the credibility of theology. There is an appreciation of mythology as holding a deeper meaning that is also a shared meaning.

There are many complex aspects of Eliade’s description of myth that may be less useful to the conversation. Eliade believed myth transmitted something totally necessary for human life; the unrecognizability of God.⁴⁸ God is not readily apparent. It is only through myth that humans encounter, or even can encounter, the divine. This is a much

⁴⁵ Matei Calinescu, “Imagination and Meaning: Aesthetic Attitudes and Ideas in Mircea Eliade’s Thought,” *The Journal of Religion*, 57, no. 1 (1977) <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0022-4189%28197701%2957%3A1%3C1%3AIAMAAA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-B>.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁷ Pluralism often leads to questions about inclusivism in Christianity, and that is an interesting issue, but not relevant to the discussion at hand.

⁴⁸ Calinescu, “Imagination,” 4. Calinescu when discussing Eliade uses the term unrecognizability.

more agnostic claim than how a Christian will approach thoughts about God. Still when Eliade's ideas are taken into consideration, with some mythological limits, they can be helpful. It is important to put him into the context of being an anthropologist, first, and as having ideas that apply to theology, second. He is working from a standpoint of rationality, as previous sources have. He does not engage mythologically with the ideas he presents.

An additional caveat must be added that Eliade is speaking of 'primitive' religions within his works.⁴⁹ Applying them to theology must be done carefully. This does not mean that Eliade's ideas are useless for theology, but they should be understood as primarily intended for a non-theological audience.

Eliade distinguishes between 'true' stories and 'false' stories by recalling the Navajo's same distinction.⁵⁰ The 'true' stories were myths, the 'false' stories more closely resembled folklore, or tall tales. Myths in this case are used by societies described by Eliade in order to add power and dimension to rituals done. Myths specifically are recalled within the ritual process, where as any person could tell the 'false' stories, or folk tales, at any time.

... a "primitive" could say: I am what I am today because a series of events occurred before I existed. But he [*sic.*] would at once have to add: events that took place *in mythical times* and therefore make up a *sacred history* because the actors in the drama are not men but Supernatural Beings. In addition, while a modern man, though regarding himself as the result of the course of Universal History [*sic.*], does not feel obliged to know the whole of it, the man of the archaic societies is not only obliged to remember mythical history but also to *re-enact* a large part of it

⁴⁹ Mercia Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press Inc., 1998), 2.

⁵⁰ *Myth and Reality*, 8-10.

periodically. It is here that we find the greatest difference between the man of the archaic societies and modern man: the irreversibility of events, which is the characteristic trait of History for the latter, is not a fact to the former.⁵¹

This quote has quite a bit to say that is both problematic and helpful to applying anthropological methods to theological work.

Eliade stresses the need for recitation of myth in order to cause mystical change.⁵² Does this seem so far from the Christian system of worship? Admittedly, there are wide levels of variance between Protestant denominations, and even among the possibly more unified Catholic groups. Still, there seems to be some of these same mythical elements to the performance of Christian rites. Does communion not follow the account of Jesus' Last Supper and betrayal? Admittedly, there is a difference in the kinds of events referenced by the two forms of ritual. Myths described by Eliade happened in a mythical pre-history. Christian rituals recall specific historical events. The reality of the last supper in history is meaningful to Christians. If in form Christians resemble the primitives, then Christians may acknowledge their own capacity for allowing myth the deep level of meaning it can have outside of skepticism.

The Gospel of Matthew provides the text of the story that institutes this last supper; there are parallel stories in the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of Luke.⁵³

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never

⁵¹ Eliade, 13.

⁵² Ibid., 17-18.

⁵³ Mtt., *NSRV*, 26:26-30, Mk 14:22-26, Lk 22:14-23.

again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."⁵⁴

Again, the story tells more than what literally happened, it tells the modern Christian what continues to happen. As the ritual of communion is acted out on a weekly, or recurring basis, the ritual recalls the story of Jesus' Last Supper with his Apostles. Christians are connected in the telling of this story and in this ritual act to the mythical history of their savior.

Eliade seems to question within *Myth and Reality* whether mythical understanding is possible by modern human civilizations. As a result of scientific reasoning, Eliade believes modern humans are incapable of seeing the world with the same point of view that primitive societies hold. The only way Eliade sees it practical to study myth is from looking quite specifically at primitive societies' relationship with mythology. His concern with mythology is a concern at preserving a record of primitives. "... In 'primitive' societies myths are still living, still establish and justify all human conduct and activity"⁵⁵

In order best to appreciate how Eliade's arguments might help the relationship between rationality and faith, the discussion must be freed from Eliade's own limits of expectations. This is not going against his synthesis of ideas about myth. This is putting that synthesis into action in order to engage in a line of questioning not concerned with the origins of religious ideas. Eliade put limits on the full potential of his ideas, in order better to address the concern of recording religion rather than participating with an active religion. If one is to take religion seriously, some of the arguments made should be

⁵⁴ Mtt. *NSRV*, 26:26-30.

⁵⁵ *Myth and Reality*, 5.

applied to Christianity. One might better understand how myth participates in the current Christian set of ideas.

Eliade's discussion of how a myth functions in these primitive societies is reminiscent of Christian ritual recollection of myth. The Australian totemic myths are invoked before the rituals of the cult are carried out; specifically the origin myths of where certain rituals came from. So too does the Christian ritual of communion recall the commissioning of the ritual with a repetition of description of the Last Supper between Jesus and his Apostles. This mirrors a number of other mythical motivational forms as described by Eliade, including the Naga cult and the aboriginal tribes.

Eliade cites Malinowski, another respected anthropologist when discussing not just the importance of myth, but the manner in which myth functions:

Studied alive, myth...[sic.] is not an explanation in satisfaction of a scientific interest, but a narrative resurrection of a primeval reality, told in satisfaction of deep religious wants, moral cravings, social submissions, assertions, even practical requirements. Myth fulfills in primitive culture an indispensable function; it expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization; it is not an idle tale, but a hard-worked active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom.⁵⁶

This is an excellent discussion of the story. Myth is an undeniable part of the human experience. It alters the human experience and defines it. Whether or not one accepts a scientific vision of reality or not, myth provides a deeper sensibility to reality.

⁵⁶ Branislow Malinowski, *Myth in Primitive Psychology*, (1926; reprinted in *Magic, Science and Religion* [1948; reissued, 1992 by Waveland Press, Inc., Prospect Heights, IL] 101,108 cited in Mercia Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 20.

Bultmann and Mythology

Myth may lead one to a place in which reason is no longer sufficient for discussion of the holy, or is no longer necessary. Reason may take one to a point of understanding but there is a feeling of mystery that must always remain within the realm of religion. It is possible that there could be a passionless religious faith, based on absolute certainty, but not likely and not one that could remain relevant to the conversation.

One Christian thinker who dialogues well with Eliade's ideas is Rudolf Bultmann. Bultmann talks about mythology specifically in Christian terms, and is not impeded by a reluctance to participate in a single religious tradition. Bultmann wished to find the parts of the Gospel that were most true to Jesus' deliverance of God's message. He wished to "de-mythologize" Christianity without purging this message. His attempt at using reason to examine scriptures is what adds credibility to his argument in the larger framework presented here.⁵⁷

When Bultmann began writing, it was the early twentieth century in Germany. Many events happened that are historically important and may have affected some of the conclusions he reached in his works. Although he was in Germany during the First World War, he stated that it had no effect on his writing or theology. Still, his theology did respond to other liberal theologians of his day who seemed to be turning Christian scripture into a series of morality stories about how one could do specific actions and be

⁵⁷ Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, (New York: Charles Scribner's & Sons, 1958), 2.

saved. Bultmann desired to move past this, as he found it, ‘simplistic’ view of Christianity.

Bultmann’s definition of “de-mythologizing” is, as he notes, most troubling.⁵⁸ His work was not meant to dispel mythology, but rather to interpret it in a way that is both true to scriptures and true to some of the problems that are inherent in historical study. This concept is only troubling for matters of definition. The concept of “*Kerygma*” that will be left once the ‘de-mythologizing’ occurs is close to the working model of mythology outlined earlier in this argument. The word is derived from a Greek term for preaching the good news. He saw it as the preaching of Jesus reaching the direct experience of the modern Christian; as opposed to reaching towards some theoretical construct of meaning. This, again, is a very aesthetic approach to theological ideas. Bultmann focuses on Jesus, and especially the concept of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God must be understood in a different manner than merely literal, because so much history has intervened since the first century.⁵⁹ The way human reasoning accounts for the universe has changed, according to Bultmann. In describing this, he writes:

The whole conception of the world which is presupposed in the preaching of Jesus as in the New Testament generally is mythological; i.e., the conception of the world as being structured in three stories, heaven, earth and hell; the conception of the intervention of supernatural powers in the course of events; and the conception of miracles, especially the conception of the intervention of supernatural powers in the inner life of the soul, the conception that men can be tempted and corrupted by the devil and possessed by evil spirits.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 18.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

It is an interesting, although controversial statement to make. In order to take Bultmann seriously, one must belong to a Christianity that has taken a much more metaphorical understanding of the biblical author and not to a church that has more fundamentalist values. Especially troubling to fundamentalist voices is the denial of spiritual warfare and the denial of direct intervention by God on the universe. This last of Bultmann's claims is most controversial. He states, matter of-factly, that any study of history is the study of "an unbroken whole."⁶¹

This assumption is a similar assumption to that of the neo-Darwinian scientists. History is a metaphysical system in this context in the same way that materialism was a metaphysical system in the context of Dawkins. It would seem possible for a God that could be understood with theology to work within history.

As stated earlier, there are certain aspects of theology that are key to keeping theology a unique and useful discipline. The doubt of God's direct action in history would seem to call into question several key aspects of Christianity. The purpose of belief in Jesus could become very different as a result of holding that idea as true; the idea, that is, of the incapacity of God directly intervening in human history.

Eliade discussed an instance in Polynesian mythology where certain mythical events might be traced to a specific, historical event. He maintains "far from "creating" myths, historical events end by being adopted into mythical categories."⁶² The historical

⁶¹ *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 15.

⁶² Mercia Eliade, *Shamanism*, trans. Willard R. Trask, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 362.

facts of the event are transformed into mythical facts. Whether or not they actually happened becomes secondary to how the mythology has interpreted the event.

What then, according to Bultmann, could the purpose of mythology be?

Myths express the knowledge that man [*sic.*] is not master of the world and of his [*sic.*] life, that the world within which he lives is full of riddles and mysteries and that human life also is full of riddles and mysteries.⁶³

Here is a mission statement of Bultmann's examination of mythology. There is a purpose, but it is not to convince people to suspend their disbelief. This is not an invitation set aside their rational nature. This is to encourage people to enter into a certain kind of relationship with the world that is based on a truth that sacrifices absolute human authority. Bultmann wanted a God identified beyond history.⁶⁴ This was important as a response to the liberal theologians who were Bultmann's contemporaries in the early twentieth century. They sought to find a historical Jesus and God in ways that Bultmann felt would limit Christianity. God, to Bultmann, was wholly other, and the understanding that humans could reach was an existential one that interpreted interaction.⁶⁵

When the term "existential" is used to talk about Bultmann, it refers to something different from what his colleague and close friend Heidegger meant. This "existentialism" is an understanding of the world based on one's existence. This means that an understanding of the self is important to understanding both religion and all of reality. By way of example, Bultmann saw twentieth century humans as living with a

⁶³ Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 19.

⁶⁴ Richard Bultmann, *Rudolf Bultmann: Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era*, ed. Roger A. Johnson, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 12.

⁶⁵ *Interpreting Faith for a Modern Era*, 19.

scientific worldview. Whether or not they actively acknowledge it, they do not believe that the earth is arranged in the same manner that first-century Christians would have believed. While keeping this scientific worldview in mind, it is possible to remain Christian, but not if one is finding ideas constantly in conflict. One must be able to recognize how a message speaks to the time it is speaking to, rather than focus on the literal application of a historically embedded term or idea. By doing this work Christians allow the *Kerygma* to spread in a manner that is healing and nourishing rather than confusing or dogmatic.

It is important to have an understanding that does not confuse Christians. Bultmann believed that de-mythologizing would allow problems caused by the clash of a scientific worldview, which twentieth and twenty-first century humans have, whether or not they are well versed in science, and the pre-scientific worldview of the gospels to be slightly alleviated.⁶⁶ The conflict is not fully resolved, it is the legacy of being a modern human and a Christian, but one can see where some solutions may lie.

A portion of the problem with reason in faith is a problem of salvation. Humans who choose to remain religious in the twenty-first century need reasons to do so. No longer is 'Christendom' an unquestioned empire of religion and government run by one and the same ecclesial body.⁶⁷ As such, some humans find a need to find new, non-traditional ways of making religion maintain a kind of coercive power that it no longer has. This coercive power does still exist for these humans coping with the modern world.

⁶⁶ *Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era*, 37.

⁶⁷ The argument may be made that Christendom is still in existence as a conceptual empire rather than an enforced empire.

It exists within fundamentalist responses to science. It exists when murder is called for on the basis of religious authority. This power is the power of fear, and works against the dialogue rather than for it

In response to a growing public change from sacred to secular caused by some nineteenth and twentieth century scientific revelations, large groups of Christians decided that the answers given by science were to be considered anathema, or antithesis, to the true message of Christianity. These groups cannot be appeased by anything less than a literal interpretation of Scripture as being fundamentally true. This takes Scripture to a definition that is limited by the ability of words to communicate divine experience.

There are problems with the fundamentalist arguments. Most troubling is the implication that humans may only act according to God's will if they limit their knowledge of the causal chain within God's kingdom. None of the arguments made above would find this to be a satisfying manner in which humans could be required to live. Leibniz and Haught both believed God to be capable of great things. Mayr does not believe that humans were meant to limit their knowledge, in spite of God. A living God does not necessarily have to manage the most minute details of someone's life. Scientific explanations of cause and effect do not necessarily remove the truth from explanations empowered by myth. Myth tends to answer more of the motivation for the cause and effect rather than the empirical cause and effect relationships alone.

FATHER ANDREW GREELEY

One twenty-first century figure in religion that sees the power of myth and ritual in a context compatible with the atmosphere of ideas gleaned from Eliade and Bultmann

is Father Andrew Greeley. Greeley is a sociologist and ordained Catholic priest who publishes an article in the Chicago Sun Times on a weekly basis. Father Greeley is a controversial figure in talking about general Catholic theology. However, he does present, in his person, a prototype for how a new encounter between faith and reason might happen in a manner sensitive to the stories contained within religion. Greeley sees a problem with identifying doctrinal perfection with religious truth. This he sees especially among Catholics, although the critique may be extrapolated to mainline Protestants. In order to remain religious in the twenty-first century, Greeley proposes a different attitude towards theology. Within one of his articles, he states:

In fact, doctrine results from reflection on experiences and images and stories. It is essential because we were and are rational reflective beings and we must articulate our experiences and our insights in prose sentences and in systematic organization of such sentences. We cannot do without creeds and catechisms and theology. But the origins and raw power of religion are found in the stories.

Catholic stories are incarnational, they speak of God incarnate in the human condition at Christmas time and God going down to the valley of death with us and returning alive with us on Easter. They speak of a community of the followers of Jesus bonding with one another to pass on the heritage which is formed by the stories. The doctrines are latent in the stories. Both are necessary, but the stories come first. Alas, for much of which passes for Catholic religious education, the stories are discarded in favor of the doctrines. All the Trinitarian and Christological controversies in the early Church, as important as they may be, do not have the appeal or the value of the image of Madonna and Child.⁶⁸

Father Greeley states how theology has its origins for the twenty-first century Christian; more specifically, a twenty-first century Catholic. For Fr. Greeley the beauty and function of religion lies not in the doctrinal approaches outlined formally. Instead, the

⁶⁸ Andrew Greeley, *Why I'm Still Catholic*,
<http://www.agreeley.com/articles/why.html> Accessed 11/02/2007.

functionality lies in the stories told, that may be addressed by doctrinal texts, but which are more primal to the nature of Catholicism and Christianity, in general.

CONCLUSION

If one is to continue either being a Christian in the twenty-first century, or even attempt to use Christian theology to derive some kind of understanding of the world, one is required to pay more attention to myth and ritual. Without these elements, as they have been defined, the task of both faith and theology will always be incomplete compared to the answers that one might glean from using sources from either hard science or secular philosophy. There is a Christian message that integrally complements theology but impossible to see without myth and ritual.

This is not a recommendation to return to a naïve mental state; the universe may remain the universe as mapped by modern astronomers. This is a mandate to recognize the role that the allegories and deep, cosmic stories play in the role of the religious thinker. They form the framework from which questions about meaning originate and they inform every moment of a human's existence; an existence constantly experiencing both the profound and the mundane. The mythical experience of Christians is still open to interaction and dialogue. Myth is not what happened once, but what continues to happen.

At the end of the Christian scriptures, the Revelation of St. John the Divine tells the Christian to bear witness constantly to what is being revealed through the Christian stories:

And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right and the holy still be holy. See I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's

work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.⁶⁹

These stories must be told with urgency, for Christians are still awaiting something more.

The faith contained in the Christian myths is not a passive faith, but one that works with great and joyous expectation of fulfillment. The time to use them is not in the future the time is now. Through theology, the modern Christian must take up the Christian mythical heritage and speak to the world with understanding shaped by faith.

⁶⁹ Rev. *NSRV*, 22:8-13.

WORKS CITED

Bultmann, Rudolf. "The Crisis of Faith." in *Rudolf Bultmann: Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era*. ed. Roger A. Johnson. 240-256. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.

_____. *Jesus Christ and Mythology*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958.

This work is a key series of lectures on understanding Jesus' preaching in light of Bultmann's 'de-mythologized' Christianity. Bultmann is very critical of myth, which is difficult on the one hand, but is more helpful in providing a skeptical view of how myth, in my sense, can possibly function in the modern, twenty-first century world.

Calinescu, Matei. "Imagination and Meaning: Aesthetic Attitudes and Ideas in Mircea Eliade's Thought," *The Journal of Religion*, 57, no. 1 (1977)
<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0022-4189%28197701%2957%3A1%3C1%3AIAMAAA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-B>. Mircea Eliade's method can be helpful to take religion seriously in a mythical context without being limited by historical-critical methods of study alone. Matei Calinescu is a Romanian born scholar of comparative literature. He teaches at the University of Indiana. Although this article is not by a theologian or an anthropologist, the literary criticism of Eliade is a perspective on the writing that is most useful.

Davidson, Jack D. "Video Meliora Proboque, Deteriora Sequor: Leibniz on the Intellectual Source of Sin," in *Leibniz: Nature and Freedom*, ed. Donald Rutherford and J.A. Cover. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. 236. Jack Davidson is recorded as a Visiting Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Memphis. He writes both about Leibniz's theological climate and theological ideas. Comparing and contrasting Leibniz to other major thinkers of the time, Davidson is attempting to clarify Leibniz's ideas about the source of sin, and for my purposes of extension; evil. This analysis helps explain how Leibniz's metaphysical universe works, and how free a human is in a way that is not readily apparent from Leibniz alone.

Horwich, Paul. *Probability and evidence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982. Horwich provides a short and interesting examination of the philosophy of science that allows me to show how science means. I wish I could use more of his work, but there is not space or time to go into some of the specific logical formulas that he uses to talk about the philosophy of science.

Eliade, Mircea. *Myth and Reality*. trans. Willard R. Trask. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc. 1963. Mircea Eliade is not a theologian, but an anthropologist. He taught at the University of Chicago. He advanced some interesting theories about the origins of religion, based more on human experience of God within myth than some other traditional anthropological methods. His ideas about mythology help inform my own understanding of how Scripture

functions in a modern, rational mind. I believe some of his theoretical ways of viewing religion are quite valuable to theologians, and can help shine some light on Bultmann's ideas, even though Eliade might not be a traditional Christian writer or source.

Eliade, Mircea. *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. trans. Willard R. Trask. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992. This work allowed me to get a firmer grasp on Eliade's methods and terms. It was helpful to use the same translator as the last work, so that terms were translated in the same manner using the same logic.

Emory University, *Biography of Thomas Kuhn*, <http://www.des.emory.edu/mfp/Kuhnsnap.html>, Accessed 10/25/2007. While attempting to avoid using online sources, this was an excellent article compiled by Emory University on the life and work of Thomas Kuhn. It is included to explain some ideas about the philosophy of science that may not be commonly known.

Greeley, Andrew. *Why I'm Still Catholic*. <http://www.agreeley.com/articles/why.html> Accessed 11/02/2007. Greeley, although a controversial figure, is an excellent example of the kind of theological and mythological engagement that I'm positing needs to happen. As both a priest and a sociologist, he has a unique ability to view the scope of the answers science and faith are able to produce.

Haught, John F. *God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution*. Boulder, CO; Westview Press, 2000. John Haught is a scholar of religion and theology from Georgetown University. Haught works with the dialogue between science and religion. His work deals with some of the problems with contemporary theology with science, and how non-fundamentalists might respond to neo-Darwinian criticisms of religion.

Leibniz, G. W. *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*. trans. E.M. Huggard. Chicago: Open Court Publishers, 1990. This book is Leibniz's classical treatment on the justice of God and the nature of sin and evil in the universe. Before the actual argument about the nature of God (which Leibniz presumes is good), Leibniz spends a great deal of time outlining his position of the compatibility of faith with reason. While he is certainly not unique amongst 17th Century theologians or thinkers in his defense of reasonable faith, his system presents some interesting links to post-Darwinian theology that withstand the test of time. Additionally, Leibniz was a mathematician as well as a theologian, and this leads me to underscore his importance to understanding how current faiths might be compatible with reason.

Mayr, Ernst. *What Makes Biology Unique? Considerations on the autonomy of a scientific discipline*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Dr. Mayr compiled this work in response to what he felt was an inadequate description of biology by other philosophers of science. While its content is not completely used

within the paper, it is important to show an example of how scientific rational sources attempt to work without mythology of any kind.

Rahner, Karl & Vorgrimler, "Myth," *Dictionary of Theology*. 2nd Edition. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981. 326-7. This dictionary definition of myth allows my argument to step beyond the traditional, western definition of myth, and move into a deeper understanding of myth necessary for making my argument.

Rolston, Holmes. *Science and Religion*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1987. Holmes Rolston is a philosopher of science who presents an interesting case for the interaction of science and religion. I find his method both useful in a certain context and problematic in another, as noted in the paper.

Torrey, Henry Augustus Pierson. "The Théodicée of Leibnitz, pt 3: Criticism." *Andover Review*. Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin & Co. (1885): 493-512. Henry Augustus Pierson Torrey is about as close as I could find to a contemporary academic critic of Leibniz in an academic journal. He was a professor of intellectual and moral philosophy at the University of Virginia. Unlike Voltaire, Torrey's criticisms are made much later and are presented in a non-figurative context. There is little attempt to parody Leibniz as Voltaire does.