

The two major voices of the movement in liberal theology known as Existentialism are Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich. Bultmann was born on August 20, 1884, in Wiefelstede, Germany; and Tillich was born on August 20, 1886, in Starzeddel, Germany. Both Bultmann and Tillich came into contact with Karl Barth's new discovery of the writings of Soren Kierkegaard; and under the influence of Kierkegaard's interpretation of the motifs of divine revelation and human existence they both repudiated the nineteenth century Liberalism. However, it was not until the later 1920's that they placed such a heavy stress on human existence.

RUDOLF BULTMANN

Rudolf Bultmann was born into a Lutheran minister's family on August 20, 1884. Upon completion of his gymnasium schooling he studied at the University of Marburg, Germany, under Wilhelm Hermann (in systematic theology) and W. Heitmuller (in New Testament). Upon completion of his studies he was made an instructor in New Testament.

Having read Barth's *Romerbrief*, and having rejected Hermann's systematics, Bultmann found himself moving in the direction of the new "realistic temper". The influence of Kierkegaard's view of human existence manifested itself in his important work, *Die Geschichte der Synoptischen Tradition (The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, first edition, 1921). In 1922 he succeeded Heitmuller as professor of New Testament. Also in the 1920's he collaborated with Barth, Gogarten, Thumeyssen, and Merz in the periodical *Zwischen den Zeiten (Between the Times)*.

During the 1920's and 30's Bultmann was not widely known until 1941, when he presented an essay entitled "New Testament and Mythology" to the *Gesellschaft fur Evangelische Theologie*. The ideas in this paper shook the German theological world, especially after it became widely circulated. At this time he began to climb the steps to the throne of German theology, until both Barth and Brunner had to admit in 1950, "*Ja, Bultmann is jetzt Konig.*" ("Yes, Bultmann is now king.")

What was it that brought Bultmann to this place of prominence? Two factors may be readily discerned: Bultmann's attack on Barthianism, and his insistence on the need for an existential interpretation of the gospel.

With respect to his attack on Barthianism, Bultmann pointed out that the Barthians had made at least three fatal errors.

Their first error lay in the fact that they had attempted to speak to the modern world, but had made only partial concessions to modern science and philosophy. They denied the historicity of Adam as the first man, but insisted on the doctrines of the Fall and of original sin. They denied the historicity of miracles, but insisted on the reality of "God's mighty acts". They denied revealed truths, but insisted on speaking of a genuine revelation of God in Christ.