

5

**The Privatization of
Eschatology and Myth:
Ernst Bloch vs.
Rudolph Bultmann**

Roland Boer

The mention of either myth or eschatology today conjures up ideas such as “myths to live by” (anyone can make a billion dollars or become president or prime minister) or sets us pondering on what happens to us when we die. In short, it is a privatized sense of myth and eschatology that dominates our perceptions. But how did it come to this? Why are the deeply collective practices of myth and eschatology now so privatized? In order to explore those questions, I turn to an old debate from the 1930s between Ernst Bloch and the theologian Rudolph Bultmann. Unlike the situation in philosophy and theology today, where both camps can proceed to talk and write about the Bible with only the barest recognition of one another,¹ what we find is a biblical scholar adept at philosophy and a philosopher with a propensity for reading biblical scholarship.² Their debate concerned the matters of myth and eschatology in the New Testament. Yet, despite Bloch’s collective and political emphasis, it seems today as though Bultmann’s existentialist reinterpretation has won the day. In this essay, then, I trace their debate in order to show how Bultmann’s existential reinterpretation of myth and privatized eschatology seems to have triumphed over Bloch. In response to a neglected Bloch and a victorious Bultmann, I seek to recover one and recuperate the other by bringing them back into contact with one another.

Before I proceed, there is a preliminary question: how are myth and eschatology connected? The answer is disarmingly simple (and obvious): eschatology is a form of myth. Indeed, stories about the end of the world

and the inauguration of a new and better age cannot avoid dealing in the language, metaphors, and narrative structures of myth. Eschatology may be regarded as a subset of mythology, along with what are conventionally called theogonic, cosmogonic, and anthropogonic myths (the creation of the gods, the universe, and human beings). To these I would add “poligonic” myths, not merely because these various types of myths are inescapably political but also because we can speak of a distinct category of political myth.³ What eschatology does is round out the picture, for all these types of myth actually deal with origins; by contrast, the concern of eschatology is the process of the end of history and whatever might follow.

Myth: Demythologization vs. Discernment

I begin my tracking of their debate with Bultmann’s call for “demythologization” [*Entmythologisierung*] of the mythology of the New Testament. Precisely what Bultmann meant by “demythologizing” is a tricky question, since the common understanding of the term is that he sought to remove the mythological framework of the New Testament. The argument appears most clearly in his manifesto, “Mythology and the New Testament,” which produced a howl of controversy when it first appeared in 1941.⁴ This essay is worth a patient rereading, not least because of the widespread caricatures of his position. Myth takes on a number of senses in this text: it is a worldview that must be periodized, a pervasive ideology, and dressing for the *kerygma*. (The Greek New Testament term for proclamation and thereby preaching, in which the Word of God—as both the spoken word and Christ as the Logos—addresses human beings.)

For Bultmann, mythology is the name of a worldview [*Weltbild*], one that precedes, temporally and logically, a scientific worldview. Mythology in this sense is a thing of the past.⁵ Mythology turns out to be periodized: it is the dominant worldview of the time before science, before “modern man,” and thus by implication before industrialization and capitalism. It is not the best of arguments, being all too easy to demolish. Bloch gives it scant attention, but we can easily call up Adorno and Horkheimer’s argument, namely, that science (enlightenment) and myth are a dialectical pair that have been carrying on their tense dance since the ancient Greeks.⁶

Yet before we rush on to dismiss Bultmann's celebration of the modern, scientific worldview, let us look a little more closely at what he says. Not even an alternative science, as Lévi-Strauss would have it,⁷ mythology is rather a nonscientific view of the world that has given way to a very different one. In the New Testament—Bultmann's prime instance—we find a worldview in which heaven is physically above, a place where the gods dwell, the underworld and its demons live below, and earth, our abode, lies in between. In this worldview Jesus comes from heaven, defeats the powers of hell in his death and resurrection, and then rises up on the clouds to return to heaven. From there he will return at some point. At this level, Bultmann is thoroughly convincing or, rather, his argument seems like common sense, at least now. But let me turn the situation on its head: it is not so much that Bultmann's position accords with common sense but that what we now take as common sense is actually the result of Bultmann's residual influence. On this level, he is absolutely correct: the story is inescapably mythological; it trades on a worldview that few if any can seriously hold. The scandal when his argument first appeared is not only in the challenge to the fundamental creeds of Christianity but also in his assertion that one could not believe such a story and maintain one's faith.

The central element, then, of Bultmann's definition of myth is that it is tied to a particular worldview or, rather, to put it more strongly, it is the very expression of a distinct worldview, namely, the prescientific and premodern. A key to this definition of myth is that it removes the element of choice from whether one believes in it or not. Here he comes close to an Althusserian notion of the inescapable pervasiveness of ideology: "no one can appropriate a worldview by sheer decision, since it is already given with one's own historical situation."⁸ This is a clever move, for it means that no one can in fact hold to mythology, for it is no longer our worldview.

So what are we to do? We have no choice but to dispense with this mythological framework for the New Testament. We cannot pick and choose the parts we like and discard those we don't. Bultmann seems to take mythology as so much elaborate clothing that needs to be removed carefully to reveal the stark naked kerygma. Statements such as the following fall into this line of thought: "We simply have to ask whether it is really nothing but mythology or whether the very effort to under-

stand it in terms of its real intention leads to the elimination of myth [*Eliminierung des Mythos*].”⁹ Here a trap opens up, for too many readers have taken such an “elimination of myth” as the key to Bultmann’s well-known program of “demythologization.” Mythology is merely the imagery attached to the *kerygma* like so much decoration, and we should not confuse the two.

Bloch pounces, pointing out that Bultmann cannot escape myth entirely and that his theory of myth lacks discernment. Bloch stresses that Bultmann’s whole approach presupposes a myth—the “heteronomous arch-myth of the Fall”¹⁰ whereby man must be delivered from himself. Mythical themes remain, such as pride, sin, and error, as does the theme of Jesus’ resignation until the moment of his death. Indeed, the great themes of judgment and grace are at the center of Bultmann’s reworked theology, as is the transcendent otherness of God, and all of these are inescapably mythical. Bultmann, it seems, is caught in a trap of his own making, despite his protestations otherwise: his argument that beliefs such as God acting decisively in an eschatological manner is not mythological in the “traditional sense” does not hold water, at least for Bloch.

However, the most sustained criticism from Bloch is that Bultmann lacks any discernment of myth. Thus Bultmann “sees all myths, irrespective of their tenor, as nothing but stale worldly talk about the ‘unworldly.’”¹¹ This is a telling point: if mythology is the outmoded worldview of the New Testament, and if such a worldview is no longer viable, then all myths, irrespective of their variations, must go. At first sight, it looks as though Bloch has indeed identified the nerve center of Bultmann’s argument. But how does discernment work? Elsewhere I have analyzed the way Bloch doesn’t quite live up to his program of discernment, but here I would rather focus on the “best practice” of the discernment of myth. For Bloch, myth is neither uniformly repressive nor liberating. One cannot say that all myth is merely false consciousness and therefore needs to be discarded. Nor is it the most wonderful invention of human beings, one that expresses our deepest truths and highest wishes. What is needed is a dialectical approach to myth. So we find that myths of liberation have a dangerous undercurrent of repression within them. For example, the myth of the Exodus from Egypt bears with it the unwelcome justification for dispossession and conquest in the Promised Land. The victim all too easily becomes the victimizer. Conversely, even

the most repressive myth has an emancipatory and utopian dimension about it. There is a moment of rebellion even if it is mercilessly crushed. For instance, the rebellion of Korah in Numbers 16 (a favorite of Bloch's) may be characterized by the story as an unforgivable sin against God and his appointed rulers, Moses and Aaron. But in the very telling of this story, the rebellion itself is preserved. In other words, it is difficult to separate liberation from repression, insurrection from deception and illusion. Bloch's great interest was to draw out the utopian element from the midst of myths of manipulation and domination. Indeed, if one looks carefully, nearly every myth has this utopian residue, an element that opens up other possibilities just when one has given up hope. For this reason, Bloch is particularly interested in biblical myth, for the subversive elements in the myths that interest him are enabled by the repressive ideologies that show through again and again.¹²

In other words, Bloch is in the business of "ein dialektisches Zugleich von Zerstörung, Rettung des Mythos durch Licht," a simultaneous dialectic of destroying and saving myth by shedding light on it.¹³ How do we do this? Bloch has two strategies, one that involves distinguishing between myths and another that entails making the distinction within myths. So he sets about distinguishing between myths that are the result of fear, ignorance, and superstition and those—and here Bloch reveals his Romantic roots—that give expression to the quality and wonder of nature. Better known is his identification of different genres—fairy tale, folk tale legend, saga, and myth—and his opting for fairy and folk tales as the most subversive of the lot.¹⁴

My preference is for the other side to Bloch's approach, namely, discerning the utopian and repressive elements within each myth. The easier part is to search for myths that have some moment of transformation and liberation or perhaps a cunning hero who wins a momentary victory through a ruse? Bloch's attention is drawn to the story of Prometheus in Greek mythology, or of the serpent in Paradise in the Bible, where we find a successful rebellion against the powers that be. The last example brings out a crucial element in this approach, for we need to read against the grain of the dominant narrative. Our hero or heroine may end up being vilified and condemned in the story for an act of willful rebellion, so we need to ask, Why is this characterized as sin or rebellion?

Is this character challenging the powers that be, so often personified as God or the gods? Once we have this principle, it is surprising how many stories do in fact speak of crushed insurrection: the serpent, Eve and Adam in the Garden, Cain challenging God, the Israelites murmuring and rebelling against Moses in the wilderness, Miriam's insurrection against Moses and Aaron, the initial rejection of the Promised Land by the Israelites, the challenges of Job, the fiery bloodcurdling language of the Apocalypse (Revelation), and so on. Like Bloch, I would rather keep both the conformist and nonconformist elements of myth rather than no myth at all, since the banishment of myth discards these utopian moments along with all that is oppressive.

What Bloch has done in response to Bultmann is introduce the issue of politics. The question is not whether the Word addresses us and calls us to follow (Bultmann's deeply Lutheran emphasis), but what side we choose. Is it to be that of the white terror of divine power and sanctioned despots, or is to be those who dare to challenge that power? These myths are deeply political.¹⁵ And the reason for this depoliticization of myth is that Bultmann fails to discern myth. What Bultmann effectively does is take myth "out of the danger area of cosmic history" and reserves it exclusively for the "lonely soul and its middle-class God."¹⁶ In other words, the politically explosive myths, especially those of rebellion and of the last things, are dumped on the side of the road. It is a little like the process of European philosophy crossing the Atlantic to North America: somewhere, somehow, all of its politics is washed off in the ocean. And what takes the place of these explosive myths? It is the private individual in the present liberal world of capitalism. For Bultmann's position, argues Bloch, is none other than a classic reformulation of the deepest doctrines of liberalism. At this point we slip into the critique of existentialism, to which I will return later.

At his best, Bloch's discernment of myth is an extraordinary approach, for it enables us to interpret the myths of any religion as neither completely reprehensible nor utterly beneficial. It is precisely through and because of the myths of dominance and despotism that those of cunning and nonconformism can be there, too. It is not merely that we cannot understand the latter without the former, but that the enabling conditions for subversive myths are precisely those myths that are not so.

Eschatology: Existentialism vs. Marxism

So we have reached the point where Bloch finds that Bultmann's program of demythologization actually ends up depoliticizing myth. Bultmann's mistake is to lump all myths together in a mythological worldview that is no longer our own. What we really need, argues Bloch, is both an awareness of the political charge of myths and a strategy of discernment to identify those shards that offer rebellious hope.

There is more: Bultmann's depoliticized Bible actually removes the world-changing power of eschatology. Now Bultmann does have an eschatology, argues Bloch, but it is very much a realized and present version. Immanent, immediate, the Moment, *hic et nunc*—all these terms describe for Bloch the shift to a present eschatology.¹⁷ All that once judged the present from the perspective of the future has been dragged into the present. If there is a future-oriented eschatology, then it is a highly personalized one: what will happen to me in the future and when I die?

Suddenly we stumble across a problem: if Bultmann has a realized version of eschatology focused on the private individual, then he does in fact have a position. It is not all slash and burn, for there is something he wants either to preserve or grow in its place. In fact, the tendency to associate Bultmann with demythologization is a misreading or perhaps half-reading; he was after an *interpretation* and not an elimination of the myths of the New Testament. Bultmann is not entirely consistent in this respect, for he does speak often of the need to “eliminate myth,” as we saw earlier. Yet if we look closely enough, demythologization turns out not to be a process of stripping the New Testament of myth. It is in fact a somewhat different task, namely, the interpretation of myth. Or as Bultmann puts it: “during the era of critical research the mythology of the New Testament was simply *eliminated*, the task today . . . is to *interpret* the mythology of the New Testament.”¹⁸ Interpretation, not elimination, is the task of demythologization. In this light, Bultmann's other slogans begin to make sense, especially ones like, “If the New Testament proclamation is to preserve its validity, then the only way is to demythologize it.”¹⁹

But how do we reinterpret myth? Bultmann goes on to interpret the mythology of the New Testament in existentialist terms, especially that of Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger. In the midst of all the detail

Bultmann makes two moves. First, he asserts that existentialism says roughly the same things as the New Testament, albeit in secular terms: “Above all, Martin Heidegger’s existentialist analysis of *Dasein* seems to be only a secularized philosophical presentation of the New Testament view of *Dasein*.”²⁰ Such a statement would have a ringing endorsement from Theodor Adorno, although it would certainly have made Heidegger’s lower lip quiver in anger. Adorno, of course, would find the secular theological nature of existentialism its most pernicious feature, for it smuggles in the authority structures of Christian theology without the figures to which this authority was traditionally attached.²¹ It is, in other words, the worst form of idolatry and the personality cult, of which Heidegger is a prime instance.

However, Bultmann is not always consistent. One moment he asserts that existentialism presents a secularized view of existence, a replacement for the language of mythology, but at the next moment he points out that the gospel of Christianity goes beyond existentialism. Or, as he puts it, existentialism describes the world as it is—that is, a fallen world—very well, but it has no story of redemption. For that we need the scandalous gospel of Christianity. Existentialism can get us only so far, for no human philosophy can ultimately provide salvation. Only God through Christ can do that: “This, then, is the crucial point that distinguishes between the New Testament and philosophy, between Christian faith and ‘natural’ self-understanding: the New Testament speaks and Christian faith knows of an *act of God that first enables our submission, faith, love, and authentic life*.”²²

Now he brings in the language of eschatology, since it provides what is unique about the Christian message. In contrast to existentialism, which has no narrative of redemption, Bultmann suggests that the *kerygma*, with the cross and resurrection of Christ at its center, is “the eschatological fact.”²³ Bultmann peppers the last pages of his manifesto with the words “eschatology” and “eschatological” so as to leave us in no doubt. Now the questions begin piling up: What sort of eschatology is it? What does he mean by the cross and resurrection of Christ? After all, that story has to be stripped of its mythological cloak and reinterpreted. And eschatology in its traditional form cannot escape the language of mythology. How is that to be reinterpreted?

Reinterpreted, it really means a direct, personal encounter with the

Word in the here and now. It is God's challenge to the individual to turn his or her life around and give it some meaning. Bultmann is after all a good Lutheran. The life-changing effect of the Word (traditionally God in Christ) is a direct and unmediated encounter. Yet who is that who addresses us? It is "a transcendent power to which both we and the world are subject."²⁴ We are to waken to the fact that there is something beyond our own existence, that there are powers "beyond all that is known."²⁵ As for myth—which includes Christ's preexistence, incarnation, resurrection, and ascension—that may be reinterpreted as "the conviction that the known and contingent world in which we live does not have its basis and purpose within itself."²⁶

Bultmann was reputedly a great preacher, one who could deliver a rousing and inspiring sermon, but these terms seem to me to lack color and narrative. The vivid imagery of the biblical stories has given way to philosophical terms. Above all, it is a highly privatized reinterpretation. Its focus is the individual encounter with the transcendent, its call to be aware of a greater reality beyond this one, a transcendence that should reorient our lives in light of the big picture.

I will return to this point in a moment, but first let us see how Bloch responds. Bloch condemns such existentialist moves, which had a deep and lasting effect in Christian theology; Paul Tillich (Adorno's supervisor for his *Habilitationsschrift*) and John Macquarrie being only the most noted among them. However, Bloch's criticism is again quite astute: he does not criticize Bultmann's existentialism as such; rather, it is what existentialism embodies and expresses that bothers him. Existentialism is a means, a language that gives voice to the deep logic of middle-class capitalist ideology. With its focus on the private and sacrosanct individual, it effaces the social world: "The bodily, the social, the cosmic: it can all, for them, be discarded from religion as worldly, as the world: the soul need not bother about it."²⁷ What we get instead is a purely individualistic focus on existence. What counts for the individual is the encounter with the Word, an encounter in which we find contact from one existence to another. And the essence of that encounter, the address from God to the individual person, has no content, it is not about anything. In the end, for Bloch, such a position is barely Christian, or rather, by abandoning any eschatological and political change, it preserves "highly unchristian conditions in the world."²⁸

Recuperating Bultmann and Recovering Bloch

Where does all this leave us? We have a Bultmann stripped of worldly concerns and yet hanging onto the central message of the gospel and a Bloch who scores a few points. Above all, despite Bloch's criticisms, it seems as though Bultmann has won the day. It is not merely because he is still regarded as one of the great theologians of the early part of the twentieth century. This existential reinterpretation (with a distinctly Lutheran twist) has triumphed. Mythology is more and more a myth to live by for each one of us. We may not buy into existentialism, but we can certainly choose from the supermarket of spiritual or secular options. A little bit of reincarnation perhaps, a general belief in a benevolent power, a sense that our good deeds will count for something, the importance of "choice," and so on. Eschatology boils down to searching for answers to our own individual end. Will it be a material death in which my ashes or decaying body becomes one with the earth? Or will it be a reincarnated life in some other form? Or will I go to heaven, which really just means being with God? The urgency of matters such as global warming or peak oil are really only urgent if they happen in my lifetime. Or if I do look beyond my lifetime, then the only way to imagine it is in terms of how my children will fare—that may inspire me to some action.

By contrast, Bloch's effort to offer a distinctly political interpretation of the Bible has not fared so well. When I mention the discernment of myth, or his politicized focus in biblical interpretation, or the search for utopian shards throughout the Bible, people react as though they are brand-new ideas. But then they dismiss him when they hear he was a communist who lived for many years in East Germany. That "ideology" has failed, after all.

In light of all this, is it possible to recover Bloch and recuperate Bultmann? As far as Bloch is concerned, the liberation theologians have been doing a rather good job. Indeed, Tom Moylan argues that political and liberation theologies served as a conduit for Bloch's work, arguing with it and transforming it, so that it entered into newer areas of politically inspired research such as postcolonialism.²⁹ Indeed, in the 1960s and 1970s, Bloch's work was deeply influential among a range of theologians, including liberal theologies such as the death-of-God, developmental and secular theologies, along with political and liberation theolo-

gies in Germany and Latin America.³⁰ I would also argue that the figure of a distinctly political Jesus of Nazareth, found in more than one “historical Jesus” today, is a legacy of Bloch’s own reading. However, the full recovery of Bloch remains a work in progress.

Bultmann is another story. One way to recuperate his very individualist emphasis is through Bloch himself, restoring the implicit collective, bodily, and political elements of his reinterpretation. The starting point for that must be Bloch’s point that Bultmann does in fact have a myth or two. One is of course the arch-myth of the Fall, in which human beings find themselves needing an encounter for the purpose of redemption. Yet I would rather focus on other elements of that mythological structure, especially Bultmann’s emphasis on the scandal of the Bible.

Bultmann insists that there is a scandal—*skandalon*—at the heart of the Christian message, or *kerygma* as he calls it. For Bultmann the scandal of the *kerygma* is that this particular person, Jesus Christ, lived an ordinary human life, was killed as a common criminal on the cross, and was raised again—not physically, but metaphorically. This person is the moment when God acts eschatologically in history, so much so that such an event changes the history, the world, and individual lives. Bultmann cannot emphasize enough that this is the scandal at the heart of Christianity: it is folly and a stumbling block. That is it; there is nothing else. Even in this form, the story is inescapably mythological, and Bultmann feels that it is not the least bit persuasive. To write that God acts eschatologically in history through a particular human being is nothing if not mythological. It is also loaded with political implications.

Bloch was not shy about seeking out a very political Jesus, who was on no account a gentle bringer of wisdom, supporter of the powers that be, and teacher of bourgeois morals (family, work, church, etc.). Bloch finds a revolutionary firebrand who opposed the Roman colonial authorities and the Jewish religious leaders in the name of an immanent and imminent Kingdom of God. Bloch is extremely keen on a flesh-and-blood Jesus who emerges from his mythical and political context (*POH*, 1256–65; *PH*, 1482–93). Unfortunately for Bloch, the historical Jesus remains as slippery as ever, and all too many searchers end up finding their own reflection in him. Yet what is valuable about this reading is the way it is resolutely political, both in terms of the apocalyptic urgency of the New Testament and the scandal of that story (*POH*, 1265; *PH*, 1493).

It is a scandal with enormous political punch. For Bultmann it is the scandal of God acting through the ordinary person of Jesus Christ; for Bloch it is the scandal of a revolutionary Jesus.³¹ The scandal may take different forms, but a scandal it is. Yet there is one other element of that scandal that is a surprise even for me. It is nothing less than the resurrection. Bultmann argues at length that the resurrection is an inescapable piece of the kerygma. Cross and resurrection are two sides of the same coin, and without the resurrection Christianity has no message. The big surprise here is that Bloch too sees the resurrection as central: for him the resurrection signals “*a thirst for justice*” (POH, 1126; PH, 1324). He does not find the resurrection a believable concept (nor does Bultmann in any physical sense); rather, it is a crucial feature of apocalyptic thought, practice, and speculation. On Judgment Day a collective resurrection overruns the merely individual notion, and justice is dispensed by a returned Christ. And this advent of Christ was always more immediate, expected soonest by revolutionary groups at revolutionary moments, such as the Albigenian wars or the German Peasants’ War: “retribution for all the living after death, for all the dead after the last trumpet, retained a wishful revolutionary meaning for those that labor and are heavy laden, who could not help themselves in reality or were defeated in the struggle” (PH, 1132; PH, 1331). As a metaphor for revolution, perhaps it is not such a bad eschatological myth after all.

Notes

- 1 What we have in fact are two distinct genealogies. For example, the current “neo-Paulinist” philosophical debate rarely mentions the work of biblical scholars; see Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute; or, Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London: Verso, 2000); Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (London: Routledge, 2001); Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003); Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005); Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, trans. D. Hollander (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004); Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003); Terry Eagleton, *The Gatekeeper: A Memoir* (London: Penguin, 2001); Terry Eagleton, *Figures of Dissent: Critical Essays on Fish, Spivak, Žižek, and Others* (London: Verso, 2003); Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (New York: Basic Books, 2003); Gabriele Fadini,

“San Paolo e la Filosofia Contemporanea: Prospettive e Sviluppi,” PhD diss., University of Padua, 2005. When it does, it is completely unaware of the “megatext” of Pauline scholarship, namely, its major themes and shifts. By contrast, Pauline scholars are locked into their own concerns, and those concerns do not include what the philosophers are saying about Paul. For examples, see Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000); Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, *Portraits of Paul: An Archaeology of Ancient Personality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996); Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999); James A. Smith, *Marks of an Apostle: Deconstruction, Philippians, and Problematizing Pauline Theology* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005); Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997); Neil Elliott, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994); Neil Elliott, “Paul and the Politics of Empire: Problems and Prospects,” in *Paul and Politics: Ekklēsia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl*, ed. Richard A. Horsley (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 17–39. Also see Daniel Boyarin, “Paul and the Genealogy of Gender,” Diana Swancutt, “Sexy Stoics and the Reading of Romans 1.18–2.16,” and Kathleen E. Corley, “Women’s Inheritance Rights in Antiquity and Paul’s Metaphor of Adoption,” all in *A Feminist Companion to Paul*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff (London: T and T Clark International, 2004).

- 2 Thus, in Bultmann’s works we find references to Heidegger, who influenced him deeply, but also to Wilhelm Dilthey, Ludwig Feuerbach, G. W. F. Hegel, J. G. von Herder, Karl Jaspers, Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Löwith, Karl Marx, Oswald Spengler and Jaroslav Pelikan to name but a few. For Bloch, the Bible was one of his great inspirations along with Goethe’s *Faust*. So apart from a mix of allusions and citations, he has long stretches of exegesis of biblical texts, including his book-length study of the Bible, *Atheism in Christianity*. And he read biblical scholars, especially Karl Barth, Albert Schweitzer, Julius Wellhausen, K. Budde, Joachim Jeremias, Hermann Gunkel, and, of course, Rudolph Bultmann.
- 3 See my detailed discussion in Roland Boer, *Political Myth: On the Use and Abuse of Biblical Themes* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Roland Boer, “Phases of the Gonic: Re-Reading Genesis to Joshua as Myth,” *Literary Newspaper* (Bulgaria) 13, 21 December 2005–10 January 2006 (2005–2006), 18. As far as definitions are concerned (of which there are many), I prefer the simplest: myth is an important story. Beyond that we need to see what shape that story takes. If we want such a definition, then we can’t do much better than Northrop Frye: “myth is a form of imaginative and creative thinking.” Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 35. Or, in fuller form, myth tells a society “the important things for that society to know about their gods, their traditional history, the origins of their custom and class structure.” Northrop Frye, *Words*

with Power, *Being a Second Study of the Bible and Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990), 30. As Flood points out, most definitions seek a combination of narrative, subject matter, cultural status (myths as true for a distinct community), and social functions (ideology). See Christopher G. Flood, *Political Myth: A Theoretical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 6–7. Lincoln’s concise definition—“ideology in narrative form”—captures most of these. Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). To be avoided is the baleful affect of Mircea Eliade in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Pantheon, 1954) and *Myth and Reality* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1964) and the University of Chicago’s journal *History of Religions*.

- 4 Rudolph Bultmann, “Neues Testament und Mythologie: Das Problem der Entmythologisierung der Neutestamentlichen Verkündigung,” in *Kerygma und Mythos*, ed. H. W. Bartsch, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Hamburg: Herbert Reich-Evangelischer, 1951). This exists in two translations: “New Testament and Mythology: The Mythological Element in the Message of the New Testament and the Problem of Its Re-Interpretation,” trans. Reginald H. Fuller, in *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch (London: SPCK, 1960) and “New Testament and Mythology: The Problem of Demythologizing the New Testament Proclamation,” in *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, trans. and ed. Schubert M. Ogden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984). Whereas Fuller pushes the boundaries of free translation to the point of altering the sense of Bultmann’s text, Ogden’s translation is, partly in response, so slavishly literal that Bultmann’s lucid and direct style becomes stilted and wooden. I have consulted both, but unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.
- 5 Bultmann, “Neues Testament und Mythologie,” 16.
- 6 Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Continuum, 1999).
- 7 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966).
- 8 Bultmann, “Neues Testament und Mythologie,” 17.
- 9 Bultmann, “Neues Testament und Mythologie,” 22.
- 10 Ernst Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom*, trans. J. T. Swann (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 41; Ernst Bloch, *Atheismus im Christentum: Zur Religion des Exodus und des Reichs* (Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch, 1970), 47. Swann’s translation is generally good, but every now and then he inexplicably leaves out a few sentences and rearranges Bloch’s text. Needless to say, I tread warily when using his translation, always double-checking with Bloch’s German.
- 11 Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity*, 39–40; Bloch, *Atheismus im Christentum*, 46.
- 12 I have used this approach quite fruitfully in a number of places. See Roland Boer, *Rescuing the Bible* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007); Roland Boer, “An Un-Original Tale: Utopia Denied in *Enuma Elish*,” *Arena Journal*, n.s., 25/26 (2006): 136–52.
- 13 Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity*, 37; Bloch, *Atheismus im Christentum*, 44.

- 14 Jack Zipes has pursued this angle on the discernment of myth with some gusto. See Jack Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* (New York: Routledge, 1979); Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tale and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization* (New York: Routledge, 1988).
- 15 See Boer, *Political Myth*.
- 16 Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity*, 40; Bloch, *Atheismus im Christentum*, 46.
- 17 Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity*, 40; Bloch, *Atheismus im Christentum*, 46.
- 18 Bultmann, "Neues Testament und Mythologie," 24.
- 19 Bultmann, "Neues Testament und Mythologie," 22.
- 20 Bultmann, "Neues Testament und Mythologie," 33.
- 21 Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, trans. Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973). See also Roland Boer, *Criticism of Heaven: On Marxism and Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 422–30.
- 22 Bultmann, "Neues Testament und Mythologie," 40.
- 23 Bultmann, "Neues Testament und Mythologie," 45.
- 24 Bultmann, "Neues Testament und Mythologie," 23.
- 25 Bultmann, "Neues Testament und Mythologie," 22–23.
- 26 Bultmann, "Neues Testament und Mythologie," 22.
- 27 Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity*, 39; Bloch, *Atheismus im Christentum*, 45.
- 28 Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity*, 42; Bloch, *Atheismus im Christentum*, 47.
- 29 Tom Moylan, "Bloch against Bloch: The Theological Reception of *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* and the Liberation of the Utopian Function," in *Not Yet: Reconsidering Ernst Bloch*, ed. Jamie Owen Daniel and Tom Moylan (London: Verso, 1997); Harvey Cox, "Ernst Bloch and the Pull of the Future," *New Theology* 5 (1968): 191–203; Kenneth Heintz, "The Theology of Hope According to Ernst Bloch," *Dialog* 7 (1968): 34–41; Johannes B. Metz, "The Responsibility of Hope," *Philosophy Today* 10 (1976): 280–88; Jürgen Moltmann, "Hope and Confidence: A Conversation with Ernst Bloch," *Dialog* 7 (1968): 42–55; Paul Tillich, "The Right to Hope," *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 7 (1965): 371–77. See also the articles by Walter Capps, Johannes B. Metz, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Bloch himself in *Cross Currents* 18 (1968), as well as those by Frances P. Fiorenza in *Heythrop Journal* 9 and 10 (1968 and 1969).
- 30 It is worth pointing out that the first translations of Bloch's work into English were enabled by the theologians Jürgen Moltmann and Harvey Cox, specifically the compilation of various excerpts and essays in *Man on His Own: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*. There followed soon afterward the translation of *Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom*.
- 31 I am less enamored with Bloch's suggestion in *Principle of Hope* that there is also a scandal in the practice of Christian love, which is "a love which is almost micrological, one which gathers up its own in their out-of-the-wayness, their incognito to the world, their discordance with the world: *into the kingdom where they accord*" (PH 1262; PH, 1490).