

Questions for Myth & Theology seminar 2/10/77:

1. Bultmann speaks of the need to demythologize because myth is no longer intelligible to the modern mind, and he speaks as if the need to demythologize must be universal for all people in Western culture of this time.

Lonergan, in his introduction to the course, states that "symbolic apprehensions of religious concern are still necessary for a majority at the present time."

Jonas is quoted at the end of the Robinson article as adopting a position of "some but not all"--that is, talk of divinity requires symbols and cannot be totally demythologized.

Two questions arise:

- 1) How can we determine who needs myth demythologized? (How do we recognize differentiated consciousness? High school students are taught physical and organic chemistry--should they be taught critical theology?)
- 2) How can we determine how far to go? (i.e. why not de-demythologize?)

J.P.

2. Granted that one needs a myth to live by--i.e. some statement of meaning in life--that primitives take their myth literally, that we as children took the myths of our culture and religion literally, that many (most) adults continue to take those myths literally, that most consciousnesses are not differentiated so as to know that myth is to be taken "seriously but not literally" and that even differentiated consciousness can not always live in a theoretical world of meaning: the question of the adequacy or inadequacy of a myth becomes crucial. How does one distinguish a "good" myth from a "bad" one? distinguish a true from a false one? distinguish one that--even if taken uncritically--will foster positive human growth from one that will lead to more myth (in the pejorative sense), magic, the diminution of freedom and the ultimate destruction of persons and society?

1. How can we determine who needs myth demythologized?
How do we recognize differentiated consciousness?
High school students are taught physical and organic chemistry -- should they be taught critical theology?

Begin from HS students, from story of HS teaching about forty years ago.

A chemical engineer was given a post teaching HS chemistry. He found could not succeed in teaching definitions of chemical elements, consulted an old hand, was told: Don't try to teach them definitions! Amazed, he urged: But they really will not know any chemistry at all! The old hand calmly answer: They will learn HS chemistry.

The issue turns upon the scientific differentiation of consciousness.

Chemical definitions of elements are based upon the Mendeleev periodic table.

In general they define chemical elements in the pure state, ie in the state that commonly is not found in actuality

What you and I call water is not just H_2O , but H_2O plus any number of impurities.

To learn the definitions of the elements, one has to understand the Mendeleev table (ob 1907), the meaning of "atom," of atomic numbers and atomic weights, the point that in general all ~~xxx~~ of the material universe consists of atoms or combinations of atoms.

In other words one has to grasp and familiarize oneself with a comprehensive view of the material universe, a view of considerable complexity and vast implications, on the basis of a set of definitions, which usually do not correspond to things as we find them.

Four things are possible: one may accept this view and reject one's previous views or assumptions regarding the material universe; or one may reject the modern chemist's view and cling to one's previous view; or one may be just mixed up; or finally one may accept both views. In this last and fourth case one has a differentiation ~~in~~ of consciousness

One continues to use ordinary language and ordinary meanings in everyday life; one adds on the technical language and technical concepts of chemistry in the chemistry lab, class, examination; one adds a few adjustments to ordinary language where conflict

is obvious and violent, and such adjustments may be called 'demythologization.'

Nor is this procedure involved in contradiction. Technical language is invented to represent scientific opinion on what things really are. Ordinary language necessarily precedes it; its purpose is practical human communication; it is needed to develop chemistry and the other sciences, and again it is needed to apply them in industry and engineering. It is valid as long as it provides a satisfactory system of names for ~~some~~ sufficiently unambiguous communications to obtain and to direct human collaboration.

How do we recognize differentiated consciousness?

- a) A base line is ordinary language, ordinary living, everyday communication
- b) Differentiations from the base line arise when there emerges a specialization

a distinct group of professional people with their own technical language, libraries, apparatus, purposes, methods, techniques, esprit de corps

who in the main communicate with one another on the level of the specialization though they may propagandize their way of life of explaining to outsiders how valuable excellent etc that way of life is.

EG Herodotus Thucydides Polybius Livy X Tacitus the Chroniclers, Gibbon Hume Macauley wrote for the general public

The bulk of modern historical writing is addressed not to the general public but to historians

Cf natural science prior to the complexities of Maxwell's equations, Einstein's Relativity, Heisenberg's matrices

Again, the average religious person and the monks and hermits, ascetics and mystics, whose main occupation is living religiously in the sense that the meaning of their whole life is in God, the Ultimate, Nirvana,...

Again, the presocratics, the seven sages of Greece, vs the increasingly technical philosophers of the Academy, the Lyceum, the Stoa.

c) Now differentiations from the base line react upon the base line: a certain amount of demystification or demythologization occurs; philosophic scientific ascetic-mystical language ~~xx~~ seeps into everyday speech; again the eprspectives and theorems of philosophers, historians, religious innovators, scientists exert a more or less accurate influence on the thought ~~xx~~ behind ordinary language.

How can we determine how far to go?

The answer depends on one's philosophy, theology, religious life, knowledge of history, knowledge of science.

Bultmann, a Neokantian with Herrmann's Lutheran reinterpretation of Neokantianism: objective science was esteemed parallel to Luther's worthless works; transcendental subjectivity was taken parallel to Lyther's justifying faith. (Roger Johnson)

Karl Jaspers, Fritz Buri, existentialists with a Kantian background: ie rationalism with doubts about Pure Reason; drop the kerygma as well as the~~xx~~ myth.

Lonergan, in th e main, merely a method
Research, interpretation, history

Dialectic: limitations of technically sound R I H, due to presence or absence of I M R conversion

Foundations: apply conversions; set up ~~xx~~ general and special basic terms and relations.

Doctrines: what really was so

Systematics: what could that possibly mean in each case in terms of basic terms and relations

Who needs myth demythologized?

Need arises when earlier manners of speech give difficulty. People ask do you really mean that?

The problem is to produce the differentiation of consciousness in which they will get clear ideas on "really mean," "literally mean."

According to question children primitives most adults take myths literally; most have not differentiation to be able to grasp meaning of taking myth ~~xx~~ not literally but seriously; even differentiated consciousness does not live solely in its differentiation.

Feb 10, 1977

4

The partial answer is to assign the intention of the so-called myth (Bultmann: self-understanding, ie an ecstatic self-understanding that reveals you to yourself as you are before God)

Again, God's gift of his love (Rom 5, 5)

Do I love God? Consciousness like a concerto, upper middle lower voices. Sower seed word. Wayside thorns birds. Good ground 30 60 100 fold. A life of meditation and prayer promote religious gift of God's love from barely conscious to intermittently to powerfully conscious.

Does God love me? The passion death and resurrection of Jesus are ~~xx~~ the revelation that God so loved the world.

The fuller answer is post-Bultmannian. It applies all the techniques, critical of critics as well as of religious people, to reach the full picture of Christianity as fact and as meaning.

Medieval effort on basis of coherence in tradition.

Modern has to include historical difference, development, study: a problem that has been around for a few centuries but is not yet fully and adequately handled in detail.