

Theology, in the strict sense of the Christian doctrine of God, presupposes that there is an ultimate reality, including a strictly ultimate reality, whose meaning for us is a vital question for human beings simply as such. So, too, christology, in the same strict sense of the Christian doctrine of Jesus Christ, presupposes that there was a historical person whom Christian witness asserts to be of decisive significance for answering that vital existential question. Thus, if it is called upon to justify its strictly theological presupposition, theology appeals, and must appeal, to the findings of philosophy, and specifically of metaphysics and ethics. Likewise, if it is called upon to justify its strictly christological presupposition, christology appeals, and must appeal, to the findings of empirical history.

Because this is so, it is entirely understandable that Bultmann should say that what is meant by the "*that*" of Jesus' having come, which is decisive for Christian witness, is "a historical person whose historicity can be verified precisely by historical-critical research"; and that among other reasons why such research is necessary for Christian proclamation is so that the Jesus whom it proclaims will not be misunderstood as a merely mythical figure, rather than as the historical figure he really is. But understandable as this may be, it gives no reason whatever for questioning that what Christian witness *asserts* about Jesus, as distinct from what it *assumes* about him, is a strictly existential-historical assertion that historical-critical research, and thus empirical-historical findings, can in no way either verify or falsify.

31 January 2000; rev. 22 July 2006