

I have long found it somewhat strange and forced to speak, as Bultmann does, of "presupposing" the hermeneutical rules or the method(s) of historical-critical research. Rules and methods as such are not what is presupposed; rather, rules are followed or methods are employed, given something else that is presupposed—namely, (1) that being precisely a text, the text has to be interpreted as such, whatever one's aim or objective in interpreting it; and (2) that the appropriate aim or objective in interpreting this text is this aim or objective rather than that, or that aim or objective rather than some other.

Having presupposed that the text is precisely that, a text, one naturally follows the hermeneutical rules or employs both the historical- and literary-critical methods necessary for understanding and/or critically interpreting it as such. Many and various as these rules and methods may be, they are all ways of answering the first question to be put to any text in understanding and/or critically interpreting it—namely, "What does the text say?" Unless *ital.* and until one has determined what is actually *said* by the text, one cannot possibly understand and/or critically interpret what the text *means*.

But any text may be reasonably understood and/or interpreted as having more than one meaning, depending upon one's aim or objective in understanding and/or critically interpreting it. Consequently, the second question to be put to any text in understanding and/or critically interpreting it—namely, "What does the text mean?"—is not so much a question as a question formula—a formula for asking any of a number of different questions that may be put to a text in understanding and/or critically interpreting it. Thus, in the case of any particular text, the question has to be formulated more specifically, in some such way as this: "What does this text mean, given this, that, or the other aim or objective in understanding and/or critically interpreting it?"

The necessary presuppositions of understanding and/or critically interpreting any text, then, are that it is a text that, as such, says something and that what it means by what it says is a variable, depending upon one's aim or objective in understanding and/or critically interpreting it. Given some aim or objective, one can question the text in a certain way, or by

reference to a particular question. And if one's questioning it in this way follows the appropriate rules and employs the appropriate methods, one can understand and/or critically interpret the meaning of the text. But to presuppose anything beyond this would be to presuppose the results of one's understanding and/or interpretation, and thus to disclose that it could not really be anything of the kind. *That* a text says something and *that* it means something by what it says, depending upon the question one chooses to put to it, are all that may be presupposed by any proper understanding and/or critical interpretation. For *what* the text says, and *what* it means by what it says, can never be presupposed by any proper understanding and/or critical interpretation, but can only be discovered through them.

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