

## Concerning "die Sachkritik"

It now seems clear to me that what is properly meant by "*die Sachkritik*" is not what I distinguish as "immanent criticism," but, rather, "transcendent criticism." At any rate, this is how Marxsen certainly uses the term; and I now realize, as I should have realized all along, that even Bultmann probably uses it in this way, too.

Thus, when he characterizes it as criticism of what is said by what is meant, what he really means by the second is what *ought to be* meant, or, alternatively, what is *claimed* to be meant. (See, e.g., *NTM*: 60 f., where he says that "interpretation of the NT can only be critical in the sense that it measures the theological formulations of the NT by their own subject matter [=*Sache*]," and then goes on to speak of "the peculiar paradox that research can acquire its understanding of the subject matter, of the eschatological occurrence, only from the witnesses of the NT and yet at the same time is critical of these same witnesses. It is bound to these witnesses and yet also free from them, being freed from them precisely through them themselves.")

Perhaps what kept me from realizing this earlier is that Bultmann clearly assigns the task of *die Sachkritik*, not to systematic theology, but to NT theology and, by analogy, also to church history (cf. 65). But if one assumes, as I do, that he both holds and is right in holding that NT theology and church history are alike fully and properly *historical* disciplines, and that it is never the historian's business as such to engage in transcendent criticism (cf., e.g., *Das Urchristentum*: 8), then it's not easy to understand how *die Sachkritik* could refer to a transcendent criticism that the NT theologian and the church historian as such have no business engaging in; and so one naturally inclines to infer that *die Sachkritik* must refer to a merely immanent criticism. (Bultmann could respond, possibly, along the lines of the passage quoted below, that what he means by *die Sachkritik* is different, if not unique, because the interpreter or critic has access to the standard of criticism only through the witnesses to be criticized, whereas the kind of apologetic and "evaluation" that he denies the historian have their standards in matters to which the historian has independent access. But, clearly, even if one allows this difference, critical validation is critical validation; and it is arguably not

the proper business of the historian, whatever the source of her or his standard of validity.)

Elsewhere, Bultmann argues that "an exegesis concerned with the subject matter [=eine Sachexegese]" makes for both the possibility and the necessity of "a criticism based on the subject matter [=eine Sachkritik]," which he defines as "a criticism that distinguishes between what is said and what is meant and measures the first by the second." Such a criticism, which is demanded by an exegesis concerned with the subject matter, "can acquire its standard only from the subject matter disclosed through the text, which it does not previously dispose of." Therefore, "exegesis concerned with the subject matter finds itself in a peculiarly ambiguous or contradictory situation, since it comes to what is meant only through what is said and yet measures what is said by what is meant" ("*Das Problem einer theologischen Exegese des NTs*" : 340 f. [53 f.]).

Bultmann also argues in another place that, in face of the differences present in the NT, it becomes unavoidable to engage in "a criticism based on subject matter that has its standard in the decisive fundamental thoughts of the NT, or, perhaps better, in the intention of the message that sounds forth in the NT (Luther: 'what pushes Christ')" (GV, 3: 186).

When Bultmann says that "[i]nterpretation of the NT . . . has to inquire back behind [*sic!*] the different formulations in order to construct [or: construe], so to speak, an ideal type of the kerygma," or, in the same context, speaks of what a (NT) scholar today might be able to establish as "the unifying meaning of the NT kerygma," he is indeed talking about a necessary—indeed, absolutely fundamental—theological task. (In fact, what he means by "an ideal type of the kerygma," or its "unifying meaning," is evidently not different from what I mean by speaking of "the constitutive christological assertion," or of "the NT witness" in the singular.) But it is not a task proper to *historical* theology in general or NT theology in particular, as he evidently holds it to be, but rather a task that can be properly carried out only by *systematic* theology.

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