

Bultmann on "die Sachkritik"

It seems clear that Bultmann uses the concept of "*die Sachkritik*" to include, or even to mean, what I distinguish as "transcendent criticism."

To be sure, it is, in a sense, "immanent criticism," insofar as one considers the claim the text makes or implies for what it says about its *Sache*, as distinct from what it says. Thus a text claims to speak appropriately to Jesus Christ, and insofar as it entitles me to criticize it on the basis of this claim. But while taking the text at its word with respect to its claim to appropriateness entitles me to validate its claim as and when that claim becomes problematic, and my validation of its claim is, in *that* sense, an immanent criticism, this is not the sense I have in mind in using the concept. What I mean by "immanent criticism" of a text is a criticism, the criterion or norm for which is what is said and meant in the text itself, as distinct from whatever it is that the text claims to speak about appropriately in saying and meaning what it does. *That*—what the text is about as distinct from what it says and means about what it is about—is not immanent in the text, but transcendent of it. Insofar as *it* is the criterion or norm for judging the text, then, the criticism is properly distinguished as a "transcendent criticism," which consists in critically (in-)validating the claim of the text to speak appropriately about what lies beyond it.

Perhaps another way of clarifying the same difference is to say that talk about "*die Sache*" of the text, or, in English, what the text is about, is ambiguous, insofar as it can refer either to a reality beyond the text or to the meaning of the text, as distinct from the text itself. By "*die Sachkritik*," then, one can mean either critical *validation* of the claim of the text to be appropriate to the reality beyond it that it is about—and this is what I mean by a "transcendent criticism"—or critical *interpretation* of the text, of what the text says, by reference to what it means, i.e., by reference to the *question* it asks and its answer to this question—which is what I mean by an "immanent criticism."

I now see more clearly than I once did that such an immanent criticism can and should take both a historical or hermeneutical and a philosophical

form. In the case of the historical or hermeneutical form, immanent criticism consists in criticizing individual expressions of meaning by reference to the meaning they more or less adequately express. In the case of the philosophical form, by contrast, immanent criticism consists in criticizing individual expressions of meaning by reference to the *kind(s)* of meaning of which they are more or less adequate expressions.

But, if I understand him correctly, what Bultmann means by "*die Sachkritik*," which is to say, "*eine Kritik . . . , die zwischen Gesagtem und Gemeintem unterscheidet und das Gesagte am Gemeinten misst*" ("*Das Problem einer theologischen Exegese des Neuen Testaments*": 340 [53]), goes beyond both of these forms of immanent criticism to include, or even to be, a transcendent criticism. It is, in fact, his way of conceptualizing the kind of criticism Luther understood and practiced by measuring even the teaching of the apostles by whether or not they "push Christ." Or, again, it is the properly "critical" procedure that Marxsen distinguishes as "*die Sachkontrolle*" from the strictly "historical" procedure of "*die Exegese*." As such, however, it is, in my view, as in Marxsen's if not in Luther's, the proper business of systematic theology, as distinct from historical theology or New Testament theology.

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