

I have generally resisted Bultmann's distinction between what is a matter of authority, on the one hand, and what is a properly "scientific" matter, subject to discussion, on the other. But perhaps there is a point to this distinction that I have failed to appreciate.

Of course, an objectifying, "scientific" account can be said to be authorized by the reality it discloses, or by some prior disclosure of this reality from which it is in turn derived. But the fact remains that the account is of no importance once the reality is grasped as thus disclosed. Indeed, even the original account on which some subsequent account may be based is utterly dispensable, once one sees the reality it discloses for oneself.

It is not so, however, in the case of an existential-historical communication. For while it is indeed true that such a communication is authorized by the reality it discloses, it is equally true—at any rate, of the original such communication—that the reality authorizing it is accessible as such solely through it. This is why there is the kind of correlation—or dialectic—between the primal source of authority and the primary authority authorized by it for which I have argued (*The Point of Christology*: 103). Although the witness of the apostles derives its authority from the Jesus who alone authorizes it, the Jesus who is the only source of its authority is the Jesus to whom it bears witness and who is accessible as such solely through its witness.

This explains why the earliest witness has a unique authority; in fact, "God's act of salvation consists in his having instituted the 'ministry of reconciliation' or the 'word of reconciliation' (2 Cor 5:18 f.)" (*Existence and Faith*: 77). Another way of saying this is that, in the nature of the case, there must be a noetic as well as an ontic source of authority in the case of an existential-historical communication. The experience and faith of the apostles—or better, their faith-experience—belongs to the source of authority whereby their witness is authorized just as surely as does the Jesus who for this faith-experience is (implicitly if not explicitly) the Christ.

It is with this in mind, presumably, that Bultmann says that the “visionary experiences” of the apostles, which is what the historian perforce takes the Easter-event to be, belong to the ground of the Christian proclamation and that the hearer of this proclamation is asked whether she or he wishes to repeat the act of faith of the apostles in such a way as to acknowledge the event of their faith-experience as the decisive act of God. Although we have to take the risk of faith in the same way that they took it, we are dependent on their “experience” insofar as it itself belongs to the Christ-occurrence.

But one may grant all this, so far as I can see, even while insisting that, whether or not theology is a “science,” it is, in its own way, a matter of critical reflection, subject to discussion—and that not only with respect to the appropriateness of its claims and the claims of Christian witness, but also with respect to the credibility of the same claims.

n.d.; rev. 31 August 2003