

Bultmann distinguishes variously between:

(1a) the Bible's *showing* me a possibility for understanding my existence that I can decide either to accept or reject; and (1b) the Bible's becoming a word addressed to me personally *giving* me existence ("Zum Problem der Entmythologisierung" [1952], *Kerygma und Mythos* 2: 191; cf. *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*: 106);

(2a) *translating* understanding in the sense of understanding identical with translating the question of decision addressed to both the interpreter and—through the interpreter—her or his hearers; and (2b) *believing* understanding in the sense of a believing yes instead of an unbelieving no to the question of decision (Letter to Karl Barth [11-15 November 1952], *Karl Barth-Rudolf Bultmann Briefwechsel*: 173 f.);

(3a) *existentialist* interpretation in the sense of understanding the text within the framework, or, better, under the question, of its self-understanding and in an appropriate existentialist conceptuality; and (3b) *existential* understanding in the sense of understanding oneself accordingly, and thus as one finds oneself understood in the text (*Ibid.*: 189 f.).

(4a) *scientific (existentialist) understanding* of scripture; and (4b) *obedience* to the kerygma in the sense of existential understanding of oneself in accordance with it ("Das Problem der Hermeneutik" [1952], *Glauben und Verstehen* 2: 212 f., n.); and

(5a) *existential encounter* with the biblical text in the sense of encountering its claim or being offered a self-understanding that can be accepted (as a gift) or rejected; and (5b) *a yes response of "confessing faith"* in the sense of accepting the gift of the self-understanding offered by the text ("Ist voraussetzungslose Exegese möglich?" [1957], *Glauben und Verstehen* 3: 149; cf. *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*: 152).

That these five distinctions are very closely related is obvious. In fact, it's arguable that they are only verbally different ways of making one and the same distinction. Supporting this argument is the further, clearly parallel distinction Bultmann makes in connection with some of them between "methodical," "scientific," or "existentialist" interpretation, on the one hand, and "the work (or gift) of the Holy Spirit," on the other. Thus he says, in connection with 1a/1b, that the possibility of the Bible's becoming a word addressed to me personally that gives me existence is "a possibility that I cannot presuppose and reckon with as a principle of methodical interpretation. That it is ever actualized is—in traditional terminology—the work of the Holy Spirit." And he makes the same point in connection with 2a/2b by saying that "believing," as distinct from "translating," understanding is "*donum Spiritus Sancti*," and with 3a/3b by saying that the only thing he can strive for methodically as an interpreter is existentialist interpretation, because the *Divinus Spiritus* works existential understanding, which can only be received "as the gift of the Holy Spirit."

On the other side, however, "being an existential decision [that] is not to be refuted by argument" is clearly not simply verbally identical with being "the work (or gift) of the Holy Spirit." The first phrase is actually used in context by way of characterizing a no response of "express unfaith" to the decision put by the text. Still, it clearly can be used equally well to characterize the yes response of "confessing faith," which prompts one to ask whether, when it is so used, it isn't simply verbally different from the other phrases that speak of the work (or gift) of the Holy Spirit. My guess, for whatever it's worth, is that Bultmann would probably answer this question negatively, analogously to the way in which, and for the same reason, he denies that "sin" is simply a mythological concept. At the same time, I can easily imagine him insisting that the only way to interpret appropriately, in existentialist terms, what faith and witness mean by the work (or gift) of the Holy Spirit is to speak of an existential decision that, unlike existentialist analysis of existence in general, is precisely not to be refuted by argument.

My question about all this, however, is whether the distinction I've been led to make between the *efficacy* of a means of salvation and its *effectiveness* isn't yet another way of making the same distinction Bultmann makes in these various ways. On the analysis lying behind my distinction, whether or not a person or an event or the witness thereto is *efficacious* for x depends on whether x so experiences it that it confronts x with *the* existential decision, i.e., the decision either for the authentic understanding of x self re-presented by the person or the event or the witness thereto or for some other inauthentic self-understanding. Whether beyond that, the same person or event or witness thereto is *effective* for x depends on whether x decides *for* the self-understanding for which the person or the event or the witness thereto calls x to decide. But this analysis of the point of my distinction clearly seems to confirm that it really is an alternative way of making just the distinction Bultmann makes, in various ways, between (a) x 's experiencing a person or an event or the witness thereto as existentially significant; and (b) x 's deciding to appropriate this significance positively by understanding x self as the person or the event or the witness thereto gives and calls x to do.

12 September 2003