

If I understand him correctly, Bultmann holds that the "*what*" of the message of Jesus is "pure Judaism," which is to say, pure law, or, at most—as he can sometimes say—law and promise. But, then, I also understand him to hold that humanism-idealism, with its laws of the spirit—of the true, the good (right), and the beautiful—is related to Christian faith as law is related to gospel, in that its laws are nothing other or less than the law of God. At the same time, when Bultmann expounds humanism-idealism, on the one hand, and Christian faith, on the other, he typically stresses the considerable difference between them, in that the first calls for ever fuller realization of the ideal human individual and community, while the second calls for radical openness to the ever-new gift-demand of God in the moment.

How, then, is all of this to be rendered consistent?

The only way, so far as I can see, is to conceive what is meant by "the law of God" as having two really different but closely related parts. The paradigm for such a conception is Paul's, when he insists that "the one who loves another has fulfilled the law," because all the commandments of the law "are summed up in the word, 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Rom 13:8 ff.). On this conception, the one word or *command* of God is the command to love, while the several *commandments* articulated in the law—humanistic-idealistic as well as Old Testament-Jewish, each in its different way—are simply stipulations of what the love command requires in the typical main contexts or situations of ordinary human life.

Jesus' teaching is pure Judaism, then, because it concentrates everything on radical obedience to God's command to love, as distinct from all merely formal obedience to the commandments of the law, especially the ritual ones. In this, Paul essentially follows Jesus, even without making anything of Jesus' distinction between moral and cultic commandments.

The *demand* of God, however, is distinct from both God's command to love and the several commandments of the law that are all summed up in it. The demand of God is simply the other side of God's gift—the demand that we obediently accept the gift of God's boundless and unconditional love by understanding ourselves and leading our lives accordingly. In obeying this

demand, we cannot but also obey God's command to love, and thereby fulfill all the commandments of the law.

On the other hand, this is the *only* way in which God's command can be obeyed and the commandments of God's law fulfilled. We can do what God commands only by obeying God's demand—the demand that we accept the gift of God's love for us and for all—by trusting unreservedly that we are loved by God and by then serving the cause of God's love with unqualified loyalty.

Which is not to say, of course, that we can obey God's command only by accepting the Christian gospel. Although that gospel is, for Christians, the primary *sacrament* of God's gift-demand—the Jesus Christ whom it proclaims being for them the *primal* sacrament thereof—the reality of God's love itself is ever present efficaciously in every human life as soon and as long as it is human at all. Therefore, there is always the possibility in fact as well as in principle that not only Christians, but all human beings will obediently accept God's love for them and for all and lead their lives accordingly. On the other hand, it is not only Christians for whom the Jesus Christ proclaimed by the gospel can become the decisive *re*-presentation of God's love and so *the* means of salvation—*the* means of obeying God's demand by accepting God's gift, and so obeying God's command and fulfilling all the commandments of God's law.

1 January 2002