

In interpreting Bultmann, I have argued that, even on his own use, "self-understanding," or "understanding of existence," includes indefinitely more than an understanding merely of myself, in abstraction from others, the world, and God. Thus I say, for example, that, in his view, "the reality of our own existence precisely as selves or persons," which is "the reality always already disclosed to each of us nonsensuously, in our own unique self-understanding,"

. . . comprises vastly more than simply our own individual existence as of any particular moment. It also includes not only our own individual past and future and all the other persons and things that encounter us, but also the transcendent reality that we experience as being of ultimate significance for us.

A few pages later, then, I adduce Bultmann's strong protest against a common misunderstanding of "existence" as "a merely anthropological, even psychological concept." On the contrary,

. . . the existence of which he speaks 'is in no way "the inner life of a human being," which can be understood apart from all that is other than it and encounters it (whether the environment, fellow human beings, or God).' For 'human beings exist only in a context of life with "others," only in encounters,' and 'existential analysis endeavors to develop an appropriate conceptuality in which this can be grasped and understood as such.' This means that to exist as a human being is to be related understandingly not only to oneself and to the world of other persons and things, but also to what Bultmann usually speaks of in such contexts simply as 'a transcendent reality' (*eine transzendente Wirklichkeit*), or, somewhat more fully, as 'an other, unworldly power that is not visible to objectifying thinking' (*eine jenseitige, unweltliche Macht, die dem objektivierenden Denken nicht sichtbar wird*) ("Toward Interpreting the Language of Spirit: The Legacy of Rudolf Bultmann," in *Language and Spirit*: 94, 100).

Just how right this interpretation is, however, even I did not fully realize until I recently reread what Bultmann has to say on the matter in the always instructive Epilegomena to his *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*. So, just for the record, I quote his statement here:

The most important thing, however, is that basic insight that the theological ideas of the New Testament are the unfolding of faith itself, growing out of the new understanding of God, world, and man—or, as it can also be formulated, *out of the new self-understanding*—given in faith. For what is meant by the new self-understanding of the believer is not understanding in the sense of a scientific anthropology that objectifies man to a phenomenon of the world, but rather an existential understanding of myself in unity with my understanding of God and the world. For I am myself not as an isolatable and objectifiable world

phenomenon, but in my own unique existence that is inseparable from God and the world (587).

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