

In trying to bring out the distinctiveness of Christian faith, I have argued (a bit misleadingly!) that the explicit understanding of existence that alone is constitutive of the faith (in the sense of *fides quæ creditur*) “is not, in the first instance, some law or teaching or word of wisdom, but Jesus himself, through whom the meaning of ultimate reality for us is decisively re-presented” (*Is there Only One True Religion?:* 97. What is misleading in this argument is its apparent implication that Jesus himself simply *is* the understanding of existence constitutive of Christian faith—whatever that could possibly mean! The truth, of course, is not that Jesus is simply identical with this understanding but rather that he is the *bearer* of it, analogously to the way in which not only the teacher of a law or teaching or word of wisdom but also the *specific formulation* of it may be said to bear it.)

This argument would surely have been more effective, however, had I remembered and made use of Bultmann’s clarification of the preunderstanding of “revelation.” According to his analysis, “revelation” in general means “*the disclosure of what is veiled, the opening up of what is hidden*—and, to be sure, in a sense that is differentiated in two ways: (1) Revelation is *the communication of knowledge by the word*, i.e., it is information through which we become acquainted with something that we were previously unacquainted with so that henceforth it is known; . . . [and] (2) Revelation is *an occurrence that puts me in a new situation as a self*, in which, to be sure, there is also given the possibility of knowledge (namely, about myself in my new situation) but without regard for whether or not this knowledge becomes explicit.” In the specifically religious context, then, Bultmann says, revelation means “*that opening up of what is hidden which is absolutely necessary and decisive for [a human being] if [she or] he is to achieve ‘salvation’ or authenticity*; i.e., revelation here is the disclosure of God to [one]—whether this disclosure is thought to take place through the communication of knowledge, through a mediating doctrine about God, or whether it is an occurrence that puts [one] in a new situation.” To which Bultmann adds, significantly, “All religions speak of revelation in either the former or the latter sense” (*Existence and Faith:* 59).

Clearly, my distinction is simply a special case of Bultmann's—provided, at any rate, that "Jesus himself" is properly thought and spoken of as "an occurrence." But if Bultmann is right—and I see no reason to think he isn't—the Christian religion need not be thought of as the only religion in which revelation is understood, in the first instance, as "an occurrence that happens to us," or "puts [us] in a new situation," rather than as "the communication of knowledge" (60 f.).

17 September 2003