

Unless I'm mistaken, Bultmann's discussion of the question of how the "legitimacy" of putative knowledge of God is to be determined (GV 2: 79) suffers from his failure to clarify sufficiently what is meant, exactly, by "legitimacy," or, as we might also say, I think, "validity." Does "legitimacy," or "validity," mean "appropriateness," or does it mean "credibility"?

If it means the first, then, of course, Bultmann is right that "the standpoint for [sc. answering] such a critical question can only be the knowledge that Christian faith has of God." But what if "legitimacy" means the second? In that case, I maintain, it is not in the least clear that he is right in simply rejecting the counterclaim of his imagined opponent, that the "critical standard by which your Christian knowledge of God must be measured" is "what we show you as God from nature and history."

I say "*simply* rejecting," because, taken just as it is, this counterclaim must indeed be rejected. It lies in the very logic of the Christian faith that it can never allow itself to be simply an object of normative decision about its credibility, but must insist upon also being a source of such decision, relative to which any other putative knowledge of God must allow itself to be an object. But because any other putative knowledge of God, like that of Christian faith, is itself both—a source of normative decision as well as an object thereof—Bultmann's simple rejection of its claim to be a source is itself too simple and insofar unwarranted, as is his correspondingly too simple assumption that Christian faith can only be the source, never an object, of such decision.

A related point worth bearing in mind is that, on his view, what Christian faith is, and therefore what the Christian knowledge of God is, is not a question that only Christians can answer. On the contrary, being a Christian is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of answering it, at least in the way in which theology is called to answer it. Precisely in defending the view that even unbelief can—indeed, must be able to—understand Christian faith, and thus what it purports to be knowledge of God, Bultmann is evidently committed to holding that Christian faith and its putative knowledge of God are, to this extent,

understandable from both historical and philosophical standpoints as well as from the standpoint of faith and theology. This, of course, in no way qualifies his point, which is that the only standpoint from which Christians are to determine what is to be understood by "God" is the standpoint of Christian faith itself. But Bultmann is emphatically on record in insisting that, in determining what the standpoint of Christian faith itself is, Christians and theologians are perforce dependent on other standpoints outside the standpoint of Christian faith itself—specifically, the standpoints of critical history and philosophy.

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