

If one asks what is really the primary authority for Bultmann, there are clear indications that it is neither the canon of scripture (or of the New Testament) as such nor some "canon within the canon" (such as Paul and John), but, rather, the apostolic witness, or, as he sometimes puts it, "the kerygma of the earliest community" (*Theologie des Neuen Testaments*: 2).

Thus, according to the argument at the beginning of *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, the theology of the New Testament consists in the ideas in which Christian faith secures its object, its ground, and its consequences. But there is no Christian faith until there is Christian kerygma, and this we find for the first time, not in the proclamation of the historical Jesus, but in "the kerygma of the earliest community." Thus the theological thinking of the New Testament begins with that earliest kerygma. It is in keeping with this basic structure that the whole *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* is organized, the theologies of Paul and John being centrally significant precisely because they fully explicate and thus provide adequate formulation of the proclamation of the earliest church.

This is further confirmed, then, when Bultmann speaks of New Testament theology as providing a control whereby the identity of present preaching and systematic theology with "the apostolic preaching" can be secured (*New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*: 62). That this "apostolic preaching" is not identical with, but distinct from, the New Testament writings is made clear by another passage in which Bultmann expressly appeals to the apostolic preaching as the primary authority. "The word of God," he argues, "is God's word only in the event, and the paradox lies in the fact that it is this word as one and the same word that begins with the apostolic preaching and is fixed in scripture and that continues to be borne by human beings in the proclamation," namely, "the word of Christ" (121).

There seems little question, then, that the primary authority for Bultmann as much as for Marxsen or for me is neither the canon as such nor some "canon *within* the canon," but rather "the canon *before* the canon" constituted by the earliest Christian witness, which he refers to as "the apostolic preaching" and as "the kerygma of the earliest community" (cf. also his references to "[t]he Easter faith of the first disciples"; "the word of

proclamation that arises in the event of Easter"; and "the emergence of faith in the risen one in which the proclamation has its origin" [39 f.]). If any theology, including Paul's and John's, is authoritative, it is only because, or insofar as, it unfolds in a more or less scientific, conceptual way the self-understanding correlative with this earliest kerygma.

Moreover, the proclamation of the crucified and risen Jesus hardly seems to be the earliest form of Christian preaching. By Bultmann's own account, the decision of faith of the first disciples at Easter was by way of *re-making* a decision they had already made in "following" Jesus during his lifetime. Therefore, insofar as this decision became explicit in the kind of kerygmatic formulations that make up the earliest layer of the synoptic tradition—and by Bultmann's own analysis, these formulations are precisely kerygmatic—we must recognize what Marxsen calls the "Jesus-kerygma" as a distinct and presumably earlier form of kerygma alongside the "Christ-kerygma." (It may be worth pointing out that Bultmann's reconstruction of the proclamation of Jesus is an implicit acknowledgement of what Marxsen means by "the Jesus-kerygma." For by his own admission, all that is certain about his reconstruction is that it is in this way that Jesus is represented in the earliest stratum of Christian witness.)

Even at this crucial point in my thinking, then, I am not very far from Bultmann's own position, provided his characteristic appeals to the Christ-kerygma as over against both the New Testament and the historical Jesus are considered in their proper context in his reconstruction of the beginnings of christology, i.e., in the context of his statement that the earliest community prior to Good Friday and Easter understands Jesus' word—"his having spoken it and their having been addressed by it"—as the decisive judging-saving act of God (*Glauben und Verstehen*, 1: 204 f.).

Summer 1983; rev. 6 February 2000