

Concerning Bultmann's interpretation of Romans 7:

Is the real point of Paul's understanding, as Bultmann claims, that the contradiction within us is "trans-subjective"? Or is it that sin is not primarily moral transgression but, rather, rejection of God's acceptance as the only ground of one's life? Or do these come to the same thing, as Bultmann evidently supposes?

If they do come to the same thing, or if Paul's real point is that the split within us is "trans-subjective," then the difference between Bultmann's view and, say, R. Niebuhr's, is so extreme that there seems to be no way to mediate between them. On the other hand, if Paul's point has to do with the nature of sin, or if this is not the same as the issue of whether or not the split in us is "subjective," or, rather, "trans-subjective," then it might be possible to mediate between the two views.

To this extent, namely: that, as Bultmann himself often allows and as Niebuhr never questions, the perfection before the act, which is the real meaning of perfection before the fall, includes as much understanding of what it means, in general, to be an authentic human being as revelation itself makes explicit--in its "what," as distinct from its "that." Therefore, while this understanding may not become fully conscious in individual cases, it can become more or less fully conscious in religions and philosophies, depending upon how radically or profoundly they understand human existence, even as the individual person may also always become more or less fully conscious of it. Even so, since faith is no more a matter of accepting a general view of human existence, even a true one, or performing certain acts, even good ones, than sin is a matter of rejecting such a view or performing contrary acts, it is entirely possible to accept a general view and to perform the acts implied by it even while rejecting rather than accepting God's acceptance as the sole basis of one's existence. Indeed, the very fact of accepting such a view or of performing the acts it implies can itself become the basis for boasting.