

In his essay, "Das Problem einer theologischen Exegese des NTs" (1925), Bultmann argues as follows:

Instead of asserting what a text says from an allegedly neutral standpoint, the exegete should open her- or himself to the claim of the text, should hear its *word*, and, in understanding it, should allow it to become an *event*. This implies that the interpreter has to expose her- or himself to the *thing* of which the text speaks and that the interpretation must be guided by the question of truth. To be sure, exegesis of the NT has to follow methodically the general standards of interpreting texts scientifically. But it becomes a meaningful undertaking as theological exegesis only insofar as it presupposes faith. In this, it corresponds to theology generally, which likewise presupposes faith, although without ever being able to dispose over this presupposition.

From my standpoint, the position Bultmann thus argues for is confused. I would insist, on the contrary, that interpretation needs to be guided by the truth question only in the sense that, insofar as the *interpretans* consists in cognitively meaningful utterances, or assertions that claim to be true (or false), it needs and deserves to be interpreted accordingly, by the interpreter's taking its utterances to make or imply claims that need and deserve to be critically validated insofar as they become sufficiently problematic to require critical validation. But so understanding the *interpretans* in no way requires believing its utterances (or, for that matter, *either* believing *or* disbelieving them!). It requires only that one understand them as making a claim to truth, and thus to be believed. So, too, I maintain that neither exegesis nor theology generally presupposes faith—as distinct from presupposing the *question* of faith.

Elsewhere, in his essay, "Die Bedeutung der 'dialektischen Theologie' für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft" (1928), Bultmann argues that "the historicity of human existence" means for NT exegesis that the texts are not to be used as sources for reconstructing a piece of the past, but are rather to be interpreted as witnesses to the understanding of human existence, which open up to me the possibility of acquiring a new understanding of myself. "Dabei setzt eine solche

Auffassung des Textes ein Vorverständnis von den Dingen voraus, von denen der Text handelt. Zugleich führt dieses Verstehen, da es stets auf meine eigene Möglichkeit hin ausgerichtet ist, zur Entscheidung, sei es des Bejahens, sei es des Verneinens jener Existenzmöglichkeit" (so Hammann: 199). Here Bultmann seems to be clear that understanding *leads to* decision, as distinct from being either simply *the same as* decision or something that is to be had only *together with* decision.

21 December 2009