

Bultmann speaks of "existentially grounded exegesis" (*die existentiell begründeten Exegese*) and, earlier in the same paragraph, of "the existential decision out of which interpretation arises" (*die existentielle Entscheidung, aus der die Auslegung stammt*) (GV 3:149).

Elsewhere he says that it is "out of the personal, existential participation of the historian that what history really is first shows itself." This is true, at any rate, if "history is more than the sum total of localizable and datable facts that can be enumerated and knowledge of which is an indispensable presupposition of historical understanding." "If history is the way of human actions and passions, it is knowable only to one who stands in the context of these actions and passions, to whom their historical point is disclosed on the ground of responsible participation" (201).

In this context, then, he asks: What follows from this for the question about the essence of Christian faith? He answers that this essence is "knowable only from the history of Christianity, but only for the existential participant in this history." This does not mean, however, as he immediately adds, "only for one who confesses Christian faith; it means, rather, only for one who is open for the question about human existence and its answer that is controlling in Christianity" (201).

But now there is not one answer in these two contexts to the question about the ground or basis of existentialist interpretation; there are two. According to the one, this ground is an existential "decision," out of which such an interpretation arises. True, Bultmann is careful to explain—in both contexts—that the decision required need not be a positive decision *for* Christian faith, as distinct from a negative decision against it. But in either case, the ground of interpretation is an existential decision. According to the other answer, however, the ground or basis of existentialist interpretation is not a decision at all, either positive or negative, but rather openness for a "question," the question about human existence, and for the answer to this question given in the text to be interpreted.

So far as I'm able to see, Bultmann never reconciles these two, very different (if also closely related) answers to the question as to the ground or

basis of an existentialist interpretation of history that goes beyond the limits of historical-critical method, strictly and properly so-called. But there's no doubt that the answers are different—and that the difference they make is important.

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