

How, according to Bultmann, is scripture rightly understood as the word of God?

Scripture is rightly understood as the word of God, according to Bultmann, only when it is allowed to "speak to the present as a power addressing our own existence" (*GV* 2:233). Only as so understood, as addressing our own existential "question about the truth of human existence," and thus as interpreted in existentialist terms, is scripture rightly understood as the word of God.

But this means, then, that scripture is not rightly understood as the word of God when it is understood either with orthodoxy as "a compendium of doctrines" that are to be held as true or with liberalism as "a document containing witnesses of the faith of others, which can bring about certain innerpsychical experiences by means of 'empathy'" (*KM* 2:200). Elsewhere, Bultmann expresses the second alternative as understanding scripture as "a document in which the faith of personalities who were strong in faith [and love] becomes visible" (*GV* 1:107; cf. 111). If faith for the first alternative is a matter of holding certain doctrines to be true, faith for the second alternative is a matter of allowing oneself to "catch" (as one catches an illness), or to be drawn into, another person's faith in God through the impression of her or his personality (cf. *GV* 1:250, 260, 106 f.). On the contrary, Bultmann argues, scripture is rightly understood as the word of God only when it is "heard as provocative word, as personal address, as kerygma, and thus when 'experience' is a matter of being affected by and responding to the address" (*KM* 2:200).

It goes without saying that the scriptures also cannot be rightly understood as the word of God when they are treated "as 'sources' for reconstructing a bit of past history, or for studying some particular religious phenomenon or the essence of religion in general, or for learning about the psychological development and objectification of religious experiences" (*GV* 2:233).

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