

According to Bultmann, understanding reports of events as acts, or the act, of God presupposes "a preunderstanding of what in general can be called God's act—as distinct, say, from the acts of human beings or from natural events" (NTMOBW: 87). Such a preunderstanding is possible because our existence is moved, consciously or unconsciously, by the question about God, and thus about God's act. "There is an existential knowledge of God present and alive in human existence in the question about 'happiness' or 'salvation' or about the meaning of the world and of history, insofar as this is the question about the authenticity of our own existence" (87).

But what preunderstanding of God's act do and must we in fact have? We preunderstand God's act to be: (1) "an act in a fully real, 'objective' sense," as distinct from being simply a way of speaking pictorially about our subjective experiences; and (2) a phenomenon in the world that one can perceive as God's act only in being existentially affected by it, and that one can talk about, therefore, only in that one oneself, as the one affected by it, is also talked about." To talk about God's act means to talk at the same time about my own existence" (110). Because human life is a life in space and time, God's act can only be an event in the particular here and now. "This event of being addressed, questioned, judged, and blessed by God here and now is what is meant by talk about the act of God" (110).

God is not a phenomenon within the world that can be objectively established. On the contrary, "God" refers to "a reality which lies beyond the reality that can be objectified, observed, and controlled, and which is of decisive significance for human existence," being "the reality that means for us salvation or damnation, grace or wrath, and that demands of us respect and obedience" (160). Thus, being human, "we are forced to recognize that we are not lords of our own life, and we become aware that the world and our life have their ground and limit in a transcendent power that lies (or powers that lie) beyond whatever we can reckon with and dispose of" (161). Therefore, we can talk about God's act, as