

That Bultmann intends no simple identification of historical and systematic theology is clear even from such early formulations as "*Das Problem einer theologischen Exegese des NTs.*"

He argues there that because, in the case of "*die Exegese,*" on the one hand, "*die Textauslegung*" is not to be separated from "*die Selbstausslegung*" and because, in the case of "*die Theologie,*" on the other hand, "*die Selbstausslegung des Menschen*" can take place only as "*die Auslegung der Geschichte,*" "*so fallen im Grunde Theologie und Exegese oder systematische und historische Theologie zusammen.*" But he goes on then immediately to qualify this by saying, "*Freilich ist in der konkreten Arbeit eine Trennung der systematischen und der historischen Aufgabe gerade deshalb notwendig, damit die Bezogenheit beider aufeinander immer wieder neu erfahren wird.*" Whereupon he says, "*Die systematische Theologie hätte dann die begriffliche Explikation der Existenz des Menschen als durch Gott bestimmter zu ihrem direkten Thema zu machen, während für die historische Theologie dies nur indirekt das Thema sein konnte, und sie direkt nur darzustellen hat, welche Auslegung des Menschen in den Texten gegeben wird, und zwar so, dass sie diese Auslegung aus der Begrifflichkeit der Vergangenheit in die Begrifflichkeit der Gegenwart bringt*" (354 [68 f.]).

One may well question whether Bultmann's way of making his point is really apt. "To coincide" is one thing, "to be related, each to the other," something else. Also "separation" is one thing, "distinction," something else; and the first is as out of place in a context where one is talking about mutual relatedness as it is in a context in which one is talking about coincidence or identity. But there can be little doubt, I think, that Bultmann is quite clear about the difference between the systematic theological task of explicating human existence before God and the historical theological task of interpreting "whatever interpretation of human existence is given in the texts," even when this is done in such a way as to translate the interpretation from "the conceptuality of the past" into "the conceptuality of the present." At the same time, Bultmann is clear that—as I should put it—historical theology necessarily *anticipates* systematic (and practical) theology, even as systematic (as well as practical) theology necessarily *presupposes* historical theology—"anticipates" and "presupposes" serving to give specific direction to

Bultmann's purely general and directionless "relatedness of each to the other." Historical theology anticipates systematic (and practical) theology by not merely establishing what the texts *say*, but also risking a critical interpretation of what the texts *mean*. (Cf. Bultmann's distinction in the same essay between "*die zeitgeschichtliche Exegese*," which asks, "*Was ist gesagt?*" and "*die Sachexegese*," which asks, "*Was ist gemeint?*" [339 f. (52 f.)].) Systematic (as well as practical) theology presupposes historical theology by not merely asking whether the witness of faith is credible to human existence, but also, and, in the first place, asking whether it is appropriate to Jesus Christ, and thus in substantial agreement with the normative witness of scripture and tradition.

The only really important point of difference, then, between Bultmann's position and my own even in such an early essay as this is his confusion of, or his failure to distinguish clearly and consistently between, *existential* (= *existentiell*) understanding and *existentialist* (= *existential*) interpretation. Included in this, of course, is his failure to distinguish clearly and consistently between theology and Christian teaching as the indirect form of Christian witness.

22 November 1994