

In Bultmann's view, as Fergusson interprets him, "wherever a person acknowledges in faith that God has spoken then that revelation becomes for them [*sic!*] decisive and absolute. The appropriate response is one of obedience rather than groping elsewhere for alternative revelations. To this extent, the Christian is irrevocably committed to the absolute significance of the cross of Christ. Yet, while this is the only possible attitude for the personal confession of faith, it is nonetheless possible, argues Bultmann, for the historian to compare and contrast the Christian religion with other religions. . . . As an historical and cultural phenomenon, Christianity can be classified and criticized. In some respects it may emerge as superior and in other respects inferior. The study of comparative religion is thus quite legitimate as an historical enterprise. This, however, is not to be confused with the standpoint of faith in which the word of God is confessed as absolute and unparalleled. When a person hears the message that God has judged, forgiven, and liberated the world in Christ this becomes, for that person, the decisive and absolute revelation. To assess it by setting it alongside other revelations would again be a[n] instance of 'objectivizing' and would lead to the destruction of the true character of faith. While this distinction would not satisfy all of Bultmann's critics (nor indeed some of his closest followers), it is nonetheless clear that it is a distinction which proceeds legitimately from the difference he perceives between faith and a world-view" (40 f.).

If Ferguson's interpretation is sound, as I, on the whole, take it to be, it seems clear that Bultmann's view converges toward my own—or vice versa. In my terms, "To be a Christian and to take Christianity to be the formally true religion are one and the same thing. . . . [Persons] cannot really be Christians at all, as long as they are such, without thinking and speaking of themselves and others and of reality generally in specifically Christian concepts and symbols" (*ITOOTR?*: 100 f.). But this in no way precludes that the Christian, as much as anyone else, can objectively compare the Christian religion with other religions and assess its relative adequacy—any more than being a Christian and taking Christianity to be the formally true religion precludes inquiring objectively into the normative Christian understanding of existence by which the appropriateness of all religion claiming to be Christian has to be judged. Bultmann's point is simply that the Christian as such, as soon and as long as she or he is a Christian, is obedient to Christ and,

therefore, has no need to look elsewhere for revelations, at least not for decisive revelation. But he does not understand this in any way to preclude the Christian's doing what any human being as such can and should do in face of claims (and counterclaims) to religious truth.

Of course, this is in no way to endorse Fergusson's interpretation insofar as it takes Bultmann to mean that a comparative assessment of religions is "quite legitimate as an historical enterprise." "Objectivizing" any such study would indeed be. But it neither would nor could be "historical" in Bultmann's sense of the word.

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