

In some of the things he says, Bultmann may well appear to have a problem with “general truths” simply as such. But I doubt very much that this is the way to interpret him. His problem with “general truths,” such as it is, is directly connected with his understanding of human beings as, most essentially, “existence,” or “historicity,” rather than “spirit,” or “rationality,” in the Græco-Roman sense of the term.

It in no way belongs to this understanding, however, to deny that human beings are essentially “spirit,” or “rationality” in this sense. On the contrary, Bultmann is well aware that the traditional affirmation to this effect contains an important truth about human existence not adequately taken in to account in the other biblical tradition. Human beings *are* “spirit,” and not to recognize this is to miss something very important about them. At the same time, he’s convinced that the other great tradition stemming from the Bible contains an even more important truth, which, as it happens, has not been adequately recognized in the classical tradition originating in Greek antiquity. For all of its importance in understanding human nature, “reason,” or “spirit,” is not the most important thing to recognize. Why? Well, because more essential to any adequate understanding of human nature is the recognition that we are existing, or historical, beings who are continually being called beyond ourselves by the events of our own individual destinies, and who must either gain or lose ourselves by our decisions in the moment in response to these calls—or this call.

One way of losing oneself is to lose oneself in “general truths,” i.e., by supposing that because or insofar as one has an adequate general understanding of things, both of the world around oneself and of one’s own actions, of how one is to act and what one is to do, one has already gained one’s true self. This supposition is simply another form of trying to secure one’s own existence by what one thinks, says, and does—in this case by what one thinks and says. But, like all the other forms of self-contrived security, whether putting confidence in the rightness of what one does or clinging to the advantages of one’s circumstances in the world, it grows out of a fundamental mistrust in one’s existence and the anxiety arising from that basic mistrust. And it is equally

unable to deliver what it promises; for whether one does or does not have adequate general ideas about things, one still has to lead one's life through ~~one's~~ one's own decisions in the moment, in face of the claims made on one by others and by the events of one's own destiny.

In themselves, however, "general truths" are valuable and important. It is only the sinful use, or misuse, of them that creates the problem with which Bultmann is understandably concerned.