

In his essay, "The Truth in Myths," Niebuhr refers to an observation of one Clutton-Brock, to the effect that

... religion is forced to tell many little lies in the interest of a great truth, while science inclines to tell many little truths in the interest of a great lie. The great truth in the interest of which many little lies are told is that life and history have meaning and that the source and fulfillment of that meaning lie beyond history. The great lie in the interest of which science tells many little truths is that spatio-temporal realities are self-contained and self-explanatory and that a scientific description of sequences is an adequate analysis of causes.

This observation provokes a number of reactions in me.

That religion, in fact, *has told* many little lies does not warrant saying that it was "*forced*" to tell them. Allowing that, at the time, an alternative procedure hadn't yet been worked out, I could agree that religious persons were "forced" to tell little lies, although this is an anachronistic way of speaking. But any implication that the constraint on them was somehow internal to the meaning of religion—along the lines of Niebuhr's own claim that the reality that is the source and the fulfillment of the meaning of history "can be revealed and expressed *only* in mythical terms" (italics added)—I could only reject as false. One reason for my rejection is that Niebuhr's claim is, on the face of it, self-contradictory, since he manifestly talks about the reality that allegedly can be revealed and expressed only mythically in terms that are in no way mythical (e.g., "an order of reality," "the totality of existence," "the facts [and occurrences] of existence"). In any case, given what I take to be the fact that a procedure alternative to myth has, finally, been worked out—by Bultmann, for one, with his demythologizing/existentialist interpretation—it is simply false that religious persons today are forced to keep on telling little lies, even in the form of acknowledging that that's what they are!

Another reaction was touched on by what I already said about "an anachronistic way of speaking." Certainly, the persons who thought and spoke mythically did not understand themselves to be telling even a little lie, but simply the truth—in the (presumably, only) terms in which, lacking any alternative procedure, they had to tell it. But, then, to say that they told, or were forced to tell, lies in the interest of the truth is to speak from the standpoint of a

differentiated consciousness unlike their own, albeit in a way that obscures rather than clarifies what was really going on.

Finally, it is not in science's interest in telling any lie that it tells its little truths, since science *qua* science is no more interested in telling the great lie it is alleged to tell than religious persons who thought and spoke in mythical terms ever supposed that they were telling lies in doing so. No, the interest in question is not science's own, but that of some ideology—a scientific metaphysics, say, that seeks to misuse science's "methodological atheism" as though it were something very different than it is.

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