

On Religion

According to Bultmann, "religion is the attempt to become lord over anxiety in face of the dark powers that encounter human beings out of nature and destiny and out of their own being; the attempt, as it were, to exorcise these powers by presenting them in pictures, by becoming thoroughly familiar with them and establishing regulated associations with them just as one associates with other human beings." Thus what is at work in religion is "not true reverence in the presence of God but anxiety about life in face of the uncanniness of the world, and this religion is simultaneously the attempt of human beings to become lord of this anxiety by bringing the uncanny under their control, integrating it into their life, thereby reassuring themselves in face of the riddle of their existence and creating their own security" (*Marburger Predigten*: 3 f.).

Bultmann also acknowledges, however, that "something right is contained in this anxious worship of God. Contained in it is *the question* of the one true God because it contains *the knowledge* that human beings are not their own lord. They are not freed from their anxiety about life by seeking to illumine the world, subjecting it to themselves and organizing it, but only by hearing the question in their anxiety, by accepting their knowledge of themselves, so that it leads them to acknowledge the one God who is Lord of heaven and earth" (5).

My question is this: granted that the accents may be different and that Bultmann is mainly concerned to stress the idolatrous, inauthentic character of religion, does he not say or imply pretty much the same sort of thing as Bergson does in speaking of the "*two sources of morality and religion*"? Or as Santayana does in distinguishing "natural" and "ultimate religion"? Or as Whitehead does in contrasting "social" and "rational religion"?

Even if the answer is yes, the fact remains that Bultmann rightly stresses the way in which religion as reassurance can be demonic, self-centered, idolatrous, and so on. No doubt part of the reason my own reflections on this question strike certain critics as one-sided is that I do not sufficiently stress this alongside all the positive things I have to say. I find it significant, however,

that, even on Bultmann's analysis, the stilling of anxiety about life, which is the goal perversely sought by religion, remains the goal also of authentic faith—albeit as transformed, in that it is not so much a goal sought as a gift received.

So long as this insight is kept in mind, all I'm really concerned about is safeguarded; and I, for my part, have every reason to acknowledge all the negative things that Bultmann and others rightly insist on.

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