THE INTEGRITY OF FAITH

Toward a Reformed Response to the Neo-Scholastic Method
of Rudolf Bultmann

by

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The Scholastic Method
Several elements in the work of Rudolf Bultmann reflect approaches central to the main stream of scholastic thought. For example, Bultmann is concerned to state the realities of the Christian faith in terms of consistent and clear categories. His concern for Karl Barth's lack of consistent concepts with respect to the resurrection of Christ is a good illustration of this theme. Bultmann does not know what Barth can mean with "events . . . which truly happen in time" but which are outside the realm of the historian's activity. Bultmann asks here and everywhere for conceptual clarification.1

A historical concept should be treated as such. Truth which is not historical should have its own non-historical categories. Christian truth should be perceived in categories which are fitting to its nature and which give full respect and scope to the truth of the other disciplines which have an undisputed place in the modern scene. This is one of the main themes of Bultmann's whole endeavor.

The work of the master schoolman, Thomas Aquinas, is also dominated by a concern for a proper understanding of the nature of Christian truth in relation to the other legitimate disciplines of his day. At the beginning of the Summa Theologica, for example, he maintains that sacred doctrine deals with realities beyond the scope of human reason and therefore beyond the resources of the philosophical or physical disciplines. At the same time, revelation may contain some truths which are accessible to natural reason. This latter part of revelation is necessary because of the importance of the knowledge of God for all. Only a few, and they with great effort, and beset with errors, can finally attain to these truths by means of natural reason alone.2 So Christian doctrine falls into the largest general categories of

1 Rudolf Bultmann, "Das Problem der Hermeneutik", Glauben und Verstehen, II. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1961, p. 234: "An Barth ist die Forderung zu stellen, dass er über seine Begrifflichkeit Rechenschaft ablegt . . . Was für Ereignisse sind das, von denen gesagt werden kann, dass sie "viel sicherer wirklich in der Zeit (geschehen) sind als alles, was die "Historiker" als solche feststellen können"? Es ist völlig deutlich, dass Barth Mittels einer mitgebrachten Begrifflichkeit die Sätze der Schrift interpretiert. Welches ist der Ursprung und der Sinn dieser Begrifflichkeit?"

2 Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Quest 1. Art. 1, respondeo.
revealed truth on the one hand and truth that is both revealed and attainable by natural reason on the other.

An example of a less general categorization of Christian doctrine is Thomas' defense of theology as an argumentative discipline. Further, Thomas will explain again and again the relation of a specific doctrine to the results of natural reason in all the related fields. His vision of truth is that of consistency and wholeness as summed up in the famous adage: "Since grace does not destroy nature but perfects it, it should follow that the natural reason will give service to faith".

The spirit of this concern for truth's integrity is shared with Thomas by Rudolf Bultmann. Bultmann may have a very different theological result and method from Thomas. He may see the "profane" sciences as not only legitimate but also as "temptation" rather than a "support" as in Thomist thought. Still, the desire to allow a consistent relation between Christian doctrine and the other sciences is a burning concern for both. When this is not achieved, according to Bultmann, we are guilty of proclaiming to men an intellectual scandal which has the effect of driving them away from the scandal of the Gospel itself.

In addition to their general concern for the responsibility of theological truth to all other truth, both Thomas and Bultmann acknowledged their need of the discipline of philosophy for their task. As they turned to philosophy they discovered a discipline with many voices which forced them to make a choice. Thomas saw in Aristotle, as he understood him, the finest expression of that "natural reason" which fitted or prepared for the truth of revelation. Rudolf Bultmann found in the book *Sein und Zeit* of Martin Heidegger the categories of human existence worked out in relation to the categories of natural science, and everyday thought. This was regarded as the voice of "natural reason" explaining the relationships of truth in such a way as to allow a responsible place for the truth of the Christian Faith. So each theologian had discovered "the philosopher" (Thomas's favorite word for Aristotle). By so doing they contrast with other Christian thinkers whose philosophical choice had fallen upon names such as Plato, Plotinus, Kant, Hegel, Whitehead, to name but a few.

The concern for conceptual responsibility leading to the selection of a philosopher as the voice of "natural reason" is common to the scholastic method. In one way or another this "natural reason" is synthesized with the revelation of the Christian Faith, and a typical relation of "nature" and "grace" is established. This relation can assume many different forms. Bultmann holds that "natural reason" is not used as a support of Christian Faith but only as the neutral language of reason by which the faith given in

\[\text{\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., Quest 1, Art. 8.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., Quest 1, Art. 8, ad secundum; \textquoteright Cum igitur gratia non tollat naturam, sed perficiat, oportet, quod naturalis ratio subserviat fidei\textquoteright}.\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{5} Glauben und Verstehen, II: 77, 78.}\]


\[\text{\textsuperscript{7} Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, \textquoteright Reply\textquoteright in Kegley, *op. cit.*, p. 276.}\]