



Alister McGrath on Bultmann and the retreat from fact

Bultmann regarded the entire enterprise of the historical reconstruction of Jesus as something of a dead end. History was not of fundamental importance to Christology; it was merely necessary that Jesus existed and that the Christian proclamation (which Bultmann terms kerygma) is somehow grounded in his person. Bultmann thus famously reduced the entire historical aspect of Christology to a single word – “that”. It is necessary only to believe that Jesus Christ lies behind the gospel proclamation (or kerygma). With such slogans, the grand generation-long retreat of Christology from historical engagement began.

For Bultmann, the cross and the resurrection are indeed historical phenomena (in that they took place within human history), but they must be discerned by faith as divine acts. The cross and the resurrection are linked in the kerygma as the divine act of judgement and the divine act of salvation. It is this divine act which is of continuing significance, and not the historical phenomenon which acted as its bearer. The kerygma is thus concerned not with matters of historical fact but with conveying the necessity of a decision on the part of its hearers.

Alister McGrath Christian Theology: an Introduction Wiley-Blackwell, fifth edition, 2011 page 305.