

Week 4: Jesus Christ and human existence

- **1. Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976)**
- R.B., *Jesus and the Word*, 1926 (ET: 1952)
- R.B., *The Gospel of John. A Commentary*, 1941 (ET: 1971)
- D. Ford (ed.), *Modern Theologians*, ch. on Bultmann
- J.F. Kay, *Christus praesens. A Reconsideration of Bultmann's Christology*, Grand Rapids 1994

Bultmann II

- At the same time NT scholar and systematic theologian.
- Exegetically under the influence of Wrede's 'radical scepticism':
- Jesus existed historically, but we have no knowledge of his personality.
- We do know his teaching, the *kerygma*.

Bultmann III

- 'I never felt uncomfortable in my critical radicalism, indeed I have been quite comfortable with it. ... I let it burn, for I see that what is burning are all the fanciful notions of the Life-of-Jesus theology, and that it is the *Christos kata sarka* himself.'
- Cf. Paul's dichotomies: 'according to the flesh' – 'according to the spirit' etc.
- Interest in 'human' Jesus is no more relevant than that in other human beings.

Bultmann III

- Important about Jesus is his Word which at once exposes the wrongness of our existence and points a way out of it (sin – forgiveness of sins).
- This happens through faith which as in Kierkegaard is miraculous.
- NT witnesses this *faith* of the early Christians → the one miracle that matters.

Bultmann IV

- Bultmann's consequence from radical dichotomy God – World is radically different from Barth's:
- Theology can only study the human response to the Word of God.
- For Barth this meant moving back to 'liberal theology'.
- Bultmann saw maintaining divine transcendence as central.

Bultmann V

- Christological insight from Gospel of John:
- ‘The Word became flesh and dwelled among us full of grace and truth’ (1 : 14a)
- Paradoxical unity of God and humanity, and the need to decide in the face of its encounter.
- ‘Ontological’ dualisms (light – darkness etc.) were later additions (acc. to Bultmann).
- Ultimately, once again there is no concept of the Incarnation.

2. Paul Tillich (1886-1965)

- P.T., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (*Part III: Existence and the Christ*, 1957).
- J. Heywood Thomas, *Tillich* (Outstanding Christian Thinkers), Continuum 2000.
- J.L. Adams, *Paul Tillich. Philosophy of Culture, Science and Religion*, New York 1965
- D. Moody Smith, 'The historical Jesus in Paul Tillich's Christology,' in: *The Journal of Religion* 46 (1966), 131-147.

Tillich II

- Tillich tended to religious socialism in the 1920s.
- Emigrated to the US in the 30s.
- Became famous after the war beyond theology and academe.
- Influenced by existentialism (Kierkegaard), but also idealism (Schelling).
- Method of correlation: theology formulates answers to necessary questions arising in culture and philosophy.

Tillich III

- This brings theology into close contact with non-theological disciplines and the wider culture.
- Unlike liberalism Tillich sees the 'answer' formulated by theology as not implied in the question.
- Christology is the answer to the puzzle of existence.
- Existence is specifically *finite* existence.

Tillich IV

- God is infinite (essence); finite existence is necessarily estranged from essence.
- This is expressed by the concept of sin.
- Existentialism brings out the dilemma of existence; thus a 'natural ally of Christianity'.
- 'Essentialism' is rejected as it presents the riddle of existence as solved through human effort.

Tillich V

- Theological answer to existential dilemma is the paradox of Jesus, the Christ.
- It 'contradicts the *doxa*, the opinion which is based on the whole of ordinary human experience, including the empirical and the rational. The Christian paradox contradicts the opinion derived from man's existential predicament and all expectations imaginable on the basis of this predicament.' (ST 2, 92)

Tillich VI

- Jesus Christ is the New Being which has been expected and desired by all religions.
- The universal quest for the New Being is a consequence of universal revelation. If it claims universality, Christianity implicitly maintains that the different forms in which the quest for the New Being have been made are fulfilled in Jesus as the Christ. [...] Christianity, to be universally valid, must unite the horizontal direction of the expectation of the New Being with the vertical one. (ST 2, 89)

Tillich VII

- Christology must equally emphasise the Jesus-side and the Christ-side of the New Being.
- Historical Jesus research rightly maintains interest in the 'Jesus-side'.
- It failed because it expected history to solve the 'Christ-side' of the paradox too.
- Even Bultmann's kerygmatic theology is rejected on this basis:

Tillich VIII

- ‘... it is impossible to retreat from the being of the Christ to his words. The last avenue of the search for the historical Jesus has been barred, and the failure of the attempt to give a foundation to the Christian faith through historical research becomes obvious.’ (ST 2, 106)
- At the same time we must know more about Jesus than the mere fact of his existence:

Tillich IX

- Kierkegaard exaggerates when he says that it is sufficient for the Christian faith nakedly to assert that in the years 1-30 God sent his son. Without the concreteness of the New Being, its newness would be empty. (ST 2, 114).
- Solution: in the response of the disciples we have traces of an analogy of image (*analogia imaginis*) which points to the true being of Christ.

Tillich X

- New Being means the reality of human life in finitude, but without estrangement.
- Is 'new' because Tillich sees Fall story not as protological.
- Christ represents the eternal relationship between God and humanity historically.
- Tillich replaces the Chalcedonian 'nature' terminology with 'relation':

Tillich XI

- The assertion that Jesus as the Christ is the personal unity of a divine and a human nature must be replaced by the assertion that in Jesus as the Christ the eternal unity of God and man became historical reality. In his being, the New Being is real, and the New Being is the re-established unity between God and man. We replace the inadequate concept 'divine nature' by the concepts 'eternal God-man-unity' or 'Eternal God-Manhood'. Such concepts replace a static essence by a dynamic relation.' (ST 2, 148)

Tillich XII

- Tillich practically moves back to an idealistic framework in spite of his rejection of such 'essentialism'.