

“Paradox” and “Dialectic” in the Theology of R. Bultmann

(An abstract)

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The idea of demythologization in Bultmann is an approach and a method of doing hermeneutics. Bultmann’s purpose was to show that the language of the Bible came from the perspectives of people who had encountered God in their lives. It tries to use the this-world experiences of biblical people to describe the activities and the Being of the other world. Like Kierkegaard, Bultmann claimed that God is the “Wholly Other,” who cannot be defined by human beings. Scriptures should be interpreted not only mentally as knowledge, but also existentially as encounter. Interpretation of the Bible is not only an exercise in exegesis, but, more important, it is a way of existence.

Bultmann’s dialectical interpretation involved two concepts: paradox and dialectic. His theological methodology was influenced by the 19th century Danish religious philosopher S. Kierkegaard. I will discuss firstly the key points of Kierkegaard’s paradoxical arguments: eternity and moment, the historical and the Bliss, limited and unlimited. Then I will lay out those elements of Kierkegaard’s paradoxical thoughts in Bultmann’s dialectical interpretation. Bultmann stressed that the Christ

event was a histological event and, at the same time, it is an eschatological event. From a temporal perspective, “was” and “is” are contradiction. However, the Christ event is God’s work; so it is a paradox. Through dialectical interpretation, it will become the reality of Christian existence. The paradox of the Christ event will become the paradox of the lives of Christians in this world.