

In rereading my work, I have often been struck by the consistency with which I have insisted all along on the full mutuality of the process of critical validation.

Far from ever holding that theology has the right as well as the responsibility to subject the Christian claim to credibility to the conclusions reached by some other religion or philosophy, I have, as often as not, taken particular pains to explain why this is not a responsible, because an insufficiently critical, theological procedure. If theology is really critical, I have insisted, it must be as critical of the claims to credibility advanced by all other religions and philosophies as it is of the claim to credibility made or implied in bearing Christian witness.

One way in which I have made this point is to argue, as I often have, that the responsibility of the theologian to speak understandably or credibly "allows for offensive as well as defensive moves in [her or] his discussion with those who do not share [her or] his first duty to secure an appropriate interpretation of Scripture" (*The Reality of God*: 121; cf. *On Theology*: 6). Another way in which I have made the same point is to hold that "even if one agrees, as I do, that Christian claims can be validated as credible only on the basis of our common experience simply as human beings, one has no reason to suppose that this requires submitting these claims to the judgment of some other religious or secular perspective, whose own claims to validity are merely that, unless and until they too are critically validated ^{[in exactly the same way].} On the contrary, pending the inquiry required to validate *all* claims to credibility, one has every reason to assume that traditional Christian views may be as much the source of critical judgment as they are its object; while any other perspective . . . may be as much in need of criticism as it is the basis for making critical judgments" (*Doing Theology Today*: 158; cf. *Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many?*: 71 f.; *On Theology*: 84-93). Still another way in which I have made the point is to distinguish between holding, as I do, that the credibility of religious assertions must be critically validated by an independent philosophy and holding, as I do not, that it must be critically validated by this, that, or the other particular philosophy. Thus, in discussing critically appropriating Paul's theology and ethics, I have argued that "[i]t is always possible, if not, in fact likely, that a particular philosophy will be

philosophically inadequate and that the truth about human existence that it is supposed to express will be more adequately expressed or implied by Paul's letters, or by the theology and ethics that critically appropriate them, than it is by the particular philosophy itself" ("Paul in Contemporary Theology and Ethics: Presuppositions of Critically Appropriating Paul's Letters Today": 305).

Thus, while I have always maintained that theology has to ask about the credibility of Christian witness as well as about its appropriateness, I have never failed to insist, in one way or another, that theology can responsibly answer this question only by treating not only the Christian claim to credibility, but *all* such claims as exactly that—*claims*, whose validity requires to be critically validated. In this way, or to this extent, I have done all that anyone can be reasonably expected to do to allow Christian witness to judge us instead of our simply judging it.

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