

"Theology" may be defined very generally as the way of appropriating more or less critically the faith and witness explicitly mediated by religion.

The qualification "more or less critically" is necessary because in the theological context, as in others, appropriation, or reflection (the terms are here used synonymously), can occur on different levels. To appropriate, or reflect, critically, on either level is to make judgments using certain criteria. But whereas, on the first, relatively less critical level, the criteria used are simply the consuetudinary criteria established in the particular context of self-understanding and life-praxis, on the second, relatively more critical level, they are the ultimate, or primal, criteria of experience and of reason based on experience as these require to be applied to particular cases in that particular context.

Simply to say, then, that theology is a way of performing the "second act" of critically appropriating the "first act" of faith and witness is to pass over the possibility that there can be less, as well as more, critical ways of doing this.

The other thing about critical appropriation in the theological context is that it is a procedure involving two main steps. Constituted as a context of reflection by the question concerning the validity of the claims made or implied in bearing, say, Christian witness, Christian theology, and so any way of doing it, can be fully carried out only by answering this question, which is to say, only by critically validating the claims. And yet, before it can validate them responsibly, it must first ask and answer the logically prior question concerning the meaning of bearing Christian witness by critically interpreting it.

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