

I have argued, in effect, that some so-called critical theologies, or understandings of theology as “critical reflection,” not only privilege the claim to truth (or credibility) made or implied by Christian witness by exempting it from critical validation, but must also do the same with the claim of some Christian witness to be authentic (or appropriate), since otherwise reflection *in* faith as well as *on* it would be empty of meaning, reflection *in* faith being meaningful only if it is reflection in *some* faith (cf., e.g., *Doing Theology Today*: 75 f.). But how convincing is this argument?

That I as a Protestant for whom faith is either explicit faith or not faith at all should find it convincing is certainly understandable. But from a Catholic standpoint, the doctrine of “implicit faith,” of believing what the church believes and teaches, whatever that should be, might appear to allow for another possibility. From that standpoint, one wouldn’t need to privilege the claim of some Christian witness to be authentic in order to reflect *in* as well as *on* faith in the church, whatever the church should teach. In one sense, one’s faith in the church would be empty, but in another sense, it wouldn’t; and one could argue that it is precisely the task of the theologian to assist in determining, in the light of scripture or some other formal norm, what the church should teach.

But this is hardly a distinct alternative after all, as long as appeal is made to scripture or some other formal norm in order to determine what the church should teach. For at least *this* norm’s claim to be authentic has to be privileged, by being exempted from critical validation, in order to be able to proceed in this way.

Or could there be a merely implicit faith in scripture or in some other formal norm, i.e., in what scripture or some other formal norm teaches, whatever that may prove to be? I don’t see how; for although, on such a position, *what* scripture or ~~some~~ ^{some} other formal norm teaches might indeed remain to be determined, *that* scripture or the other norm’s teaching is formally normative and therefore authentic and exempt from critical validation would already have been decided.

The conclusion appears unavoidable, then, that one can buy into a so-called critical theology, according to which theology is properly “critical reflection” *in* as well as *on* praxis or witness, only by (1) privileging the claim to truth of any Christian witness that is authentic by exempting it from critical validation; and (2) privileging the claim to authenticity of at least some Christian witness by exempting it, also, from such validation.

8 October 1990; rev. 9 October 2003