

Christian faith is faith in Jesus as the Christ—or, as we may say more formally, in Jesus as of decisive significance for human existence. Like any other such faith, Christian faith itself is an understanding. And this understanding of Christian faith (*genitivus subjectivus*) necessarily includes, or implies, both its necessary presuppositions and its necessary implications.

So, too, then, does the understanding of Christian faith (*genitivus objectivus*), whether at the primary level of Christian witness or at the secondary level of Christian theology. Understanding at both levels consists, first of all, in *explication*—in making Christian faith's understanding, including its necessary presuppositions and implications, explicit. If Christian witness is rightly thought and spoken of as the first such explication, which, insofar as it is critical in its appropriation of Christian faith's understanding, is relatively less so, Christian theology is correctly thought and spoken of as the second such explication, whose appropriation of Christian faith's understanding is relatively more critical.

This it is because the criteria it employs in critically interpreting Christian witness and critically validating the claims of witness to be valid are not the merely consuetudinary criteria employed on the primary level of Christian witness. Rather, they are the ultimate (or, alternatively, primal) criteria of human experience and reason as they require to be differentiated to fit the relevant context and the particular case. Thus, whether an instance of witness is, as it claims to be, appropriate to Jesus Christ is determined by Christian theology, not simply by appealing to scripture and, on some understanding or other, tradition, but rather by appealing to the specifically Christian experience of Jesus as the Christ that is attested by the apostolic witness in the strict sense of the words, i.e., the earliest, original and originating, instance(s) of Christian witness accessible to us today only by historical reconstruction from the extant New Testament writings. Whether, on the other hand, an instance of Christian witness is, as it also claims to be, credible to human existence is determined by Christian theology, not simply by appealing to traditional theological and philosophical authorities, but rather by appealing to the common human experience of existence and reasoning thereon that all such authorities always only more or

less adequately express. This means, in practice, theology's constructing "the 'right' philosophy," including, above all, a metaphysics/ethics that can withstand critical validation by just these ultimate criteria.

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