

I have argued that, in the nature of the case, there are three "basic problems of [Christian] systematic theology" corresponding to the three phases of systematic theological reflection: historical, hermeneutical, and philosophical. I have further argued that the first and third of the three problems are, in their different ways, "criteriological," whereas the second, is "hermeneutical."

But I have also argued that all three problems are alike in that each has two parts: an "in principle" part and an "in fact" part. Thus the first problem, or the problem of the first, historical phase, is to determine what is to count both in principle and in fact as formally normative Christian witness, whereas the third problem, or the problem of the third, philosophical phase, is to determine what is to count both in principle and in fact as the truth about human existence. But even in the case of the second problem, or the problem of the second, hermeneutical phase, there is, in a way, both an in principle and an in fact part. Whereas the "in principle" part has to do with analyzing the "deep structure," or logical *kind* of meaning, of formally normative Christian witness and then specifying the hermeneutical principle or method appropriate for interpreting it as well as providing the conceptuality/terminology necessary to doing so, the "in fact" part has to do with actually interpreting its "surface meaning," and so reformulating it accordingly.

But what, exactly, are the analogues in the cases of the other two problems? What, exactly, is involved in solving the "in principle" and the "in fact" parts of the first and third problems—*analogously* to the way in which solving the second problem, as I have just argued, involves, with respect to the "in principle" part, analyzing the "deep structure" of formally normative Christian witness, and, with respect to the "in fact" part, actually interpreting and reformulating the "surface meaning" of the witness?

So far as the first problem is concerned, it appears that involved in solving its "in principle" part is determining, on the basis of a proper philosophical analysis, what counts, in principle, as the constitutive witness of the Christian religious community—namely, the earliest, the original and originating, witness of this community. What is involved in solving its "in fact" part, then, is determining which

witness—the witness of Jesus himself, or the witness of the earliest Christians (i.e., the apostles) to Jesus—in fact counts as this constitutive Christian witness.

As for the third problem, it appears that solving its "in principle" part involves determining—again, on the basis of a proper philosophical analysis—what counts, in principle, as the truth about human existence—namely, the understanding of existence, or self-understanding, necessarily implied by the structure of ultimate reality in its meaning for us. Involved in solving its "in fact" part, then, is determining—also on the basis of philosophical, specifically metaphysical-ethical, analysis—what understanding of existence, or self-understanding, does in fact count as thus necessarily implied by the structure of ultimate reality in its meaning for us. (On this, cf. further, "Theology without Metaphysics?" 149 f.: "[T]here are two parts—an 'in principle' part, and an 'in fact' part—to determining what is to count as the true and authentic understanding of our existence. Doing the first part requires doing the reflection proper to the philosophy of religion, understood . . . as logical analysis of the 'deep structure,' or logical *kind* of meaning, expressed not only by religious language, but also by the implicit bearing witness that religious language explicitly authorizes. By means of such analysis, it can be determined that it is only by its substantial agreement with the true and authentic understanding of our existence that the credibility of bearing witness can be validated in principle. And it can also be determined that a self-understanding is true and authentic if, and only if, it is appropriate to, and hence authorized by, ultimate reality itself, whose meaning for us, for how we are to understand ourselves and lead our lives, is determined by its structure in itself. ¶"But then, to do the second part of determining the self-understanding that satisfies this principle in fact requires doing a different kind of philosophical reflection. It is still philosophical because it is still logical analysis. But it is logical analysis, not of the several different kinds of meaning or deep structures, whether separately or together, but of the necessary presuppositions of any kind of meaning, and so, as it were, the deepest structure of all. It is analysis, in other words, of the structure of ultimate reality itself, the threefold ultimate reality of ourselves, others, and the whole, which alone determines, and so authorizes, the true and authentic self-understanding that bearing witness claims to represent. ¶"It is doing just such analysis . . . that . . . [is] meant by the generic concept, 'doing metaphysics.'

Doing metaphysics is logically analyzing the ultimate reality of our own existence in its structure in itself.")

21 December 2008