

Any instance of Christian witness makes or implies a twofold claim to validity—to the effect that it is adequate to its content and that it is fitting to its situation.

Christian theology is constituted as such, as a distinct field of critical reflection, by the question whether this twofold claim of Christian witness to be valid is a valid claim.

To ask and answer this constitutive question, however, requires one to ask and answer three further questions that in turn constitute the three main disciplines of historical, systematic, and practical theology: (1) What has Christian witness in fact been? (2) What ought Christian witness to be so as to be adequate to its content? (3) What ought Christian witness to become so as to be fitting to its situation?

What makes any of the three disciplines a theological discipline is that it in itself is constituted by, and in some way contributes toward answering, the constitutive question of Christian theology as a field.

But, contrary to what I have sometimes thought and said, the constitutive question of systematic theology is not itself the constitutive question of the field of Christian theology. Like the discipline-constituting questions of historical and practical theology respectively, it is less encompassing and more restrictive than the constitutive question of the field as a whole.

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