

In earlier formulations (including many in *On Theology*), I define "theology" succinctly as "the critical reflection constituted by the question as to the meaning and truth of what is thought and said by a religion" (OT: 127). Thus I can argue, for instance, that "what makes one a [Christian] theologian, insofar as one is such, is not the commitment of faith one shares as a believing Christian, but only reflectively asking and answering the question as to the meaning and truth of the Christian witness, together with making whatever prior commitment this kind of reflection involves" (142 f.).

In my more recent work, however, the earlier key phrase "meaning and truth" is replaced, in effect, by "meaning and validity" (although I'm not sure I ever actually make use of this phrase!). Correspondingly, my writings make constant use of the distinction between "critical interpretation" and "critical validation"—the first being concerned with critically determining the *meaning* of Christian witness, the second, with critically validating the claims to *validity* that bearing this witness makes or implies.

This later way of thinking and speaking has at least two advantages over the earlier.

In the first place, it allows for more appropriately expressing the insight that the claim to truth, or credibility, is not the only claim to validity that bearing witness makes or implies, but rather is one of two claims included in the one claim of bearing witness to be adequate to its content, its other claim being the claim to be fitting to its situation. Bearing witness claims to be adequate to its content not only or primarily because it is true or (practically and/or theoretically) credible to human existence, but also, and in the first place, because it is appropriate to Jesus Christ. But the claims to be appropriate and credible as well as adequate and fitting can hardly all be called claims to truth, whereas there is no such difficulty in calling them all claims to validity.

The second advantage of the later way of thinking and speaking is that it removes a possible ambiguity in my earlier talk of "the real meaning of the witness of faith." Given my earlier formulation of the question of critical reflection as "What is really the case?" (112), one sense that the above phrase

could be used to express and/or taken to have is what the witness of faith *really* means, as distinct from what it appears to mean or is said to mean. But while I evidently use it in just this sense, the way I use it in at least some places may be only too easily taken to have the different sense of what the witness of faith *normatively* means. Thus I can say, "In the final analysis, the real meaning of the Christian witness is the real meaning of the *canonical* Christian witness" (140). As unobjectionable as this formulation may be in itself, as compared with saying that the real meaning of the Christian witness is the canonical Christian witness, it may nonetheless promote the very confusion between meaning and validity, or interpretation and validation, that any adequate prolegomena to theology—especially historical theology—is at pains to overcome.

11 November 1994