

I have argued that "practical theology properly asks what one is to do in the particular situation in and for which one must here and now take responsibility if one is to actualize . . . a Christian self-understanding" (OT: 97). But this understanding of practical theology is too narrow, focusing, as it does, solely on the prospective, or "constructive," as distinct from the retrospective, or "critical," role of practical theological reflection.

Of course, there is reason enough to focus on the "constructive," or prospective, role of practical theology, considering that *all* theology—historical and systematic as well as practical—is, in a broad sense, constructively practical, insofar as it is oriented, finally, to praxis for the sake of praxis. But the fact remains that there can, and, for certain purposes, needs to, be a practical theological (in-)validation of the claim of some witness already past to be fitting to its (past) particular situation, as distinct from the particular situation here and now in the present. True, one reason there needs to be such a "critical," or retrospective, practical theological (in-)validation of past witness is that, the more we learn from our past mistakes, as well as our past successes, the better chance we may have to avoid the mistakes and to repeat the successes in the future. Even so, there is nothing in practical theological reflection as such, any more than in systematic theological reflection, that requires it to be applicable only to the present and future, in the way in which the understanding argued for in the statement quoted above implies that there is.

This is true, at any rate, if what constitutes practical theology as such is the question of critical validation addressed to the fittingness of witness to this, that, or the other particular situation, past, present, or future. On this understanding, by contrast with the one expressed above, practical theology is distinct from historical theology in being constituted by (one particular form of) the question of critical *validation*, as distinct from the question of critical *interpretation*, while it is distinct from systematic theology (which asks the other particular form of the question of critical validation) in addressing its question to the fittingness of witness to the particular situation in and for

which witness is borne, as distinct from addressing its question to the adequacy of witness to its content, and thus to its appropriateness to Jesus Christ and its credibility to human existence, in any historical situation whatever.

1 March 1993