

Who has the right and the responsibility to determine what theology is and what it means to be a competent theologian?

Does the academy have this right and responsibility, in the person of such of its members as have the aptitude necessary for asking and answering the relevant questions (What is theology? What are the norms or criteria of theological competence)? Or does this right and responsibility belong, in the first (or last) instance, to the church, in the person of such of its members as happen to hold its official teaching office?

So far as I can see, Curran and McBrien, no less than Dulles, are all in the position of having to defend the second of these two answers. To be sure, they may allow that certain members of the academy having the necessary aptitude may have the right and the responsibility to contribute toward such determination. But they are committed to maintain that, in the end, if not, indeed, already at the beginning, what theology is and, therefore, what constitutes theological competence are questions that the magisterium of the church has the right and the responsibility to decide.

But, if this is their position, they have no reason to talk about parity between theology and the other fields or disciplines, whose determination or definition is incontestably the right and the responsibility of the academy. What biology is, for example, and what it means, therefore, to be a competent biologist are questions that the academy—and the academy alone—has the right and the responsibility to decide. And so, too, in the case of all of the other academic fields or disciplines. Therefore, unless the same is true of theology, it is not, and cannot be, on a par with these other fields or disciplines.

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