

Summary of the Lectures

Theology as a Christian Vocation

1. To be a Christian is to be someone whose human faith is Christian faith; someone, therefore

--who has come to faith in God by experiencing the explicit gift and demand of boundless love through Jesus; and

--who continues in this faith by believing the truth as it is in Jesus and by acting in and for the freedom for which he sets us free.

2. Such believing and acting together comprise the praxis, secular as well as religious, and, therefore, the witness of both Christians and the church. But whether the claims expressed or implied by Christian praxis or witness are, in fact, valid--i.e., appropriate and credible--is always in question; and what is properly understood by "theology" is the process or the product of critical reflection whereby these questions--i.e., as to the appropriateness and the credibility of Christian claims--are asked and answered. As such, theology is one of the two fundamental obligations of the church and of each of its members, witness or ministry being the other such obligation.

3. Theology in this sense is like any other form of critical reflection in being constituted by its questions--specifically, by its two questions as to the appropriateness and the credibility of the claims expressed or implied by Christian praxis or witness. Because these same questions suffice to establish the logical type of theological reflection, they also determine its tasks, to ask and answer both its constitutive and its constituted questions; its methods, which must be appropriate to carrying out these several tasks; its criteria, which are the same as the criteria of all other forms of critical reflection of the same logical type; its contexts, which are the contexts of self-understanding and praxis as well as of reflection and of human existence generally as well as of Christian existence in particular; and its disciplines, which are the three disciplines of systematic, historical, and practical theology, constituted respectively by the constitutive and the constituted questions of theology as such.

4. But even as there is a difference between lay and professional witness or ministry, so also is there a difference between lay and professional theology. And professional theology, exactly like professional witness or ministry, is a Christian vocation. It is not the only way of continuing in Christian faith, but one of many ways of doing so, just as being a nurse, e.g., is not something to which every Christian is called, but, rather, one of the many special ways in which individual Christians with differing gifts and in differing situations can seek to believe and to act so as to continue in Christian faith.

5. Those who have experienced a special calling as professional theologians, however, must never forget that the work to which they are thereby called is exactly that--work, good work, in fact, but nevertheless something to be as clearly distinguished from Christian faith as such as any other good work, whether religious or secular. This has the twofold implication that one in no way has to have Christian faith to be a Christian theologian and

to do what a Christian theologian has to do; and that one is never in any way justified by one's theological accomplishments any more than one is ever justified by any other good work. The professional theologian is justified by grace through faith <sup>alone</sup> without the works of the law exactly like everyone else; and as certain as it is that there can be no faith without theology, this proposition cannot be validly converted, for there can very well be theology without faith and, quite possibly, even good theology at that.

Schubert M. Ogden