

What Is Christian Theology?

Christian theology is critical reflection on Christian witness so as to validate the twofold claim to validity necessarily implied by any instance of such witness.

This summary answer may be further explained as follows:

1. Any instance of Christian witness necessarily implies a twofold claim to validity corresponding to its two essential aspects as witness.

2. On the one hand, there is the "what" of the witness, in the sense of the content it conveys either explicitly or by implication, while on the other hand, there is the "that" of the witness, in the sense of the act of witnessing. (Thus "witness" may be analyzed in much the same way in which "tradition" = traditio has often been analyzed, the "what" or content of witness paralleling the "tradition being traditioned" = traditum tradendum, and the "that" or act of witnessing paralleling the "act of traditioning" = actus tradendi.)

3. Corresponding to these two essential aspects of itself any instance of witness necessarily claims to be both an explication or implication of the content of witness that is adequate to this content and a specification of the act of witnessing that is fitting to its situation.

4. But, clearly, both parts of this claim are problematic insofar as witness may fail to be either adequate or fitting; and either part of the claim is in fact disclosed to be problematic insofar as it is called into question--as it is, for example, simply by certain other instances of Christian witness, either in existence or in prospect.

5. Once a witness's claim to validity is called into question, however, there is nothing to do but to validate (or invalidate) it by subjecting it to the relevant form of critical reflection.

6. The process of such critical reflection, or, derivatively, the product thereof, is what is properly meant by "Christian theology." (Thus Christian theology in general may be said to be either the process or the product of critical reflection on the twofold validity claim of any instance of Christian witness to be both adequate to its content and fitting to its situation.)

7. As such Christian theology allows for division into the three main disciplines of systematic, practical, and historical theology--the first being the critical reflection required to validate the claim of Christian witness to be adequate to its content, the second being the critical reflection required to validate its claim to be fitting to its situation.

8. The third discipline of historical theology is also allowed for because, in validating the claim of Christian witness to be adequate to its content, systematic theology has an essential historical aspect--namely, insofar as this claim comprises the claim that the witness is appropriate to

normative Christian witness. (Thus, although it is not historical theology but systematic theology in its historical aspect that is critical reflection on the claim of Christian witness to be appropriate, systematic theology cannot validate this claim without the critical reflection on the entire history of Christian witness that constitutes historical theology.)

9. But systematic theology also has an essential philosophical aspect insofar as the claim of Christian witness to be adequate to its content comprises the further claim that it is credible to human existence.

10. In its philosophical aspect, in which it validates this further claim of Christian witness to be credible, systematic theology necessarily presupposes philosophical theology as an independent secular discipline. (In fact, unless philosophical theology were thus independent, it could not be the critical reflection that systematic theology requires in order to validate this claim.)

11. But philosophical theology is not the only independent secular discipline or field that Christian theology necessarily presupposes; for not only does philosophical theology in turn presuppose the whole field of philosophy, together with the several special sciences both natural and human, but historical theology also presupposes the field of history in general even as practical theology presupposes all the other secular disciplines and fields engaged in critical reflection on human praxis. (Here, too, the independence of the secular fields and disciplines is critical, since otherwise theology's own truth-claims could not be validated as true.)

12. Notwithstanding the real distinctions between them, the three disciplines of Christian theology are but interdependent moments of a single process of critical reflection; on the other hand, for all of its dependence on the secular fields and disciplines that it necessarily presupposes, Christian theology and its disciplines are irreducibly different from every other field and discipline precisely in being critical reflection on Christian witness and the twofold claim to validity that it necessarily implies.

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XX-9300: THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY SEMINAR

Introduction

1. Theology is critical reflection on Christian witness so as to validate the twofold claim to validity necessarily implied by any instance of such witness.

1.1 Any instance of Christian witness is both an explication or an implication of the content of such witness and a specification of the act of witness in terms of some particular situation. Correspondingly, any instance of Christian witness expresses or implies a twofold claim to validity: that it is adequate to its content and fitting to its situation.

1.2 The first part of this claim itself involves a further twofold claim to validity: on the one hand, that what is expressed or implied by the witness is appropriate to its content because it is in agreement with normative Christian witness; on the other hand, that what is expressed or implied by the witness is credible to human existence because it is in agreement with common human experience and reason.

1.3 Theology in general may be said to be either the process or the product of critical reflection on the twofold validity claim of any instance of Christian witness to be both adequate to its content and fitting to its situation. As such, however, theology allows for division into the three main disciplines of systematic, practical, and historical theology--systematic theology being the critical reflection required to validate the claim of Christian witness to be adequate to its content and, therefore, both appropriate to this content and credible to human existence, practical theology being the critical reflection required to validate the claim of Christian witness to be fitting to its situation. The third discipline of historical theology is also allowed for because, in validating the claim of Christian witness to be adequate to its content, systematic theology has an essential historical aspect--insofar, namely, as this claim involves the further claim that the witness is appropriate because it is in agreement with normative Christian witness. Although it is not historical theology but systematic theology in its historical aspect that is critical reflection on this further claim to be appropriate, systematic theology cannot validate this claim without the critical reflection on the entire history of Christian witness that is the task of historical theology.

2. Ministry is the act of Christian witness as distinct from its content, apart from which the act neither would nor could be an instance of such witness.

2.1 Christian witness is and must be both explicit and implicit witness, depending on whether it finds expression through the specific cultural forms of religion--be they forms of belief, rite, or religious organization--or through the secular forms of culture more generally--be they forms of thought, action, or social organization.

2.2 In either case, the act of witness and, therefore, what is properly meant by ministry is constituted as such only by its content, which it expresses or implies with the twofold claim that it is both adequate to this content and fitting to its situation.

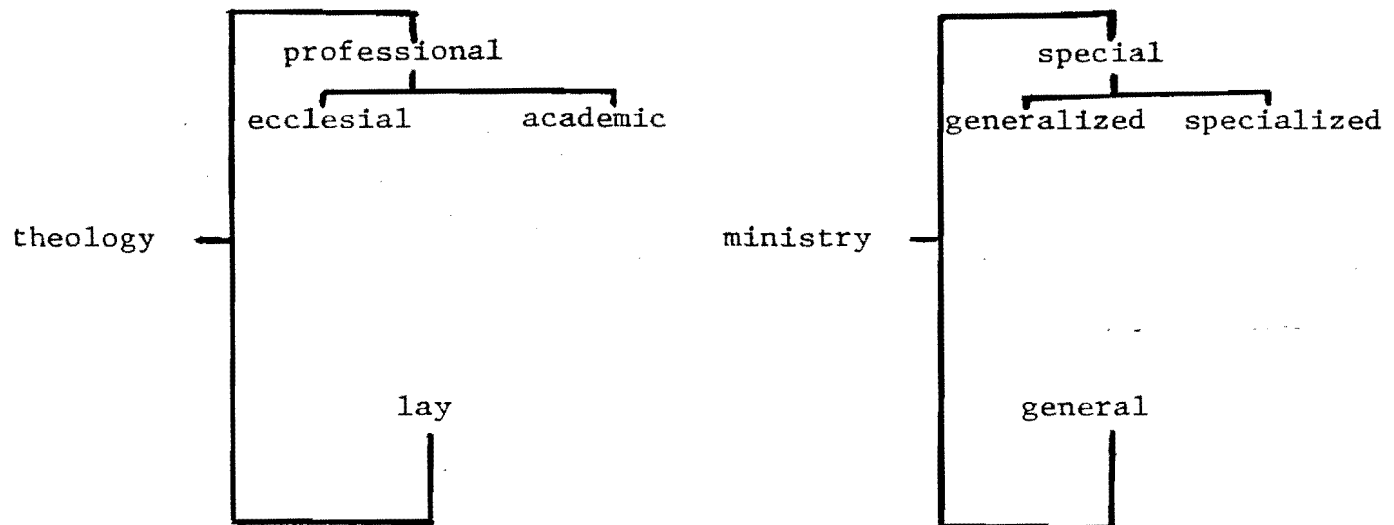
3. Theology and ministry so understood are both tasks of the visible church as such and, therefore, of each and every Christian as well as of such particular Christians as may be specially given and called to undertake them.

3.1 The visible church as such is constituted by valid Christian witness. Consequently, there neither would nor could be the visible church without both the act of Christian witness that is properly meant by ministry and, in order thereto, the critical reflection on the validity of Christian witness that is properly meant by theology.

3.2 Even so, theology and ministry alike allow for division into different levels and forms.

3.2.1 Thus there are two different levels of theology: lay and professional; and there are two different forms of professional theology: ecclesial and academic.

3.2.2 Similarly, there are two different levels of ministry: general and special; and there are two different forms of special ministry: generalized and specialized.



Any instance of witness is both an explication or an implication of the content of witness and a specification of the act of witnessing in terms of some particular situation. Correspondingly, any instance of witness expresses or implies a twofold claim to be adequate to its content and fitting to its situation.

The first part of this claim itself involves a further twofold claim: on the one hand, it is the claim that what is expressed or implied by the witness is appropriate to the constitutive christological assertion because it is in agreement with normative Christian witness; on the other hand, it is the claim that what is expressed or implied by the witness is credible to human existence because it is in agreement with common human experience.

Both ministry and theology admit of a similar analysis in terms of both levels and forms.

Thus there are two levels of ministry: general and special; and there are two forms of special ministry: generalized and specialized.

Similarly, there are two levels of theology: lay and professional; and there are two forms of professional theology: ecclesial and academic.

