

Do I need to retract what I have said in "Doing Theology Today" in order to make clear that there is no overlap between the respective tasks of historical, systematic, and practical theology?

No, I don't think so. For I do not say in that essay that systematic theology has a historical, hermeneutical, or philosophical *task*; I speak, instead, of its having a historical, hermeneutical, or philosophical *phase*. (Elsewhere I have sometimes spoken of systematic theology's having "a historical aspect," or "a philosophical aspect." But, again, "*aspect*" is one thing, "*task*," something else.) In this connection, I also speak of the specific *method* that systematic theology must follow in each of its three phases. But just as task is one thing, phase something else, so task is also something other than method.

The *methods* of systematic theology may indeed overlap, in a way, with those of the other disciplines. But this in no way entails any overlapping between *tasks*. For the same method can be used or followed in carrying out different tasks. Thus, in using or following the historical method in its historical phase or aspect, systematic theology uses or follows this method in order to carry out its distinctive task, which is to validate the claim of witness to be adequate to its content and, specifically, to be appropriate to Jesus as Christians experience him. The task of historical theology, on the other hand, in which it, too, uses or follows the historical method, is not to *validate* the claims that witness makes or implies, but rather to *interpret* the witness that makes or implies them.

So, too, with systematic theology's using or following the hermeneutical method that is specific to its second, hermeneutical phase. It uses or follows the hermeneutical method in order to carry out its distinctive task of critically validating the claims of witness to be both appropriate and credible, whereas historical theology uses or follows the same hermeneutical method to carry out its different task of critically interpreting witness.

The same holds good of systematic theology's using or following the philosophical method in its third, philosophical phase or aspect. As I have put it elsewhere, "even in taking account of all that humans beings think and

say, secular as well as religious, [Christian theology] does so only in pursuit of its own constitutive task of determining the meaning and truth of specifically Christian thinking and speaking about God" (OT: 128). In other words, systematic theology uses or follows the philosophical method to carry out its distinctive task of critically validating the claim of witness to be adequate to its content and, specifically, to be credible to human existence as we all experience it.

Fall 1991