

I have reasoned for a long time in some such way as follows:

"[T]he existential question orienting theology, although a single question about the meaning of our existence, nonetheless has two distinguishable aspects, moral as well as metaphysical, whereby it is logically related to the other questions proper to both morals and metaphysics. Thus any answer to the existential question, including that explicitly mediated by the Christian religion, at least implicitly answers both of these other questions. This explains why the indirect form of Christian witness properly distinguished as 'Christian teaching,' in which the implied answers to these other questions are more or less fully explicated, typically includes both properly metaphysical teaching about things that are to be believed (*credenda*) and properly moral teaching about things that are to be done (*agenda*). But, then, theology, at its level, must be as concerned with critically interpreting and critically validating both of these kinds of Christian teaching as it is with critically reflecting on the direct form of Christian witness that is properly distinguished as 'Christian proclamation'" ("Paul in Contemporary Theology and Ethics": 295).

I realize now, however, that, in at least one important respect, such reasoning is as misled as it is misleading. What Christian teaching typically includes about *credenda* and *agenda* is neither "properly metaphysical teaching about things that are to be believed" nor "properly moral teaching about things that are to be done." Although its teaching about *credenda* necessarily *implies* metaphysical teaching, it itself is not "properly metaphysical," but rather "properly *religious*." This means, for one thing, that it is not teaching about ultimate reality, abstractly and intellectually, *in its structure in itself*, but rather teaching about ultimate reality, concretely and existentially, *in its meaning for us*. And so, too, with its teaching about *agenda*, which likewise is not "properly moral," but rather "properly *religious*." As such, it necessarily *implies* moral teaching, although it itself has to do, not, as moral teaching properly does, with what we are to do and how we are to do it, but with who we are and who we are to be—in short, with our self-understanding, with how we are to understand ourselves authentically, given the meaning of ultimate reality for us.

The other thing that Christian teaching's being "properly religious" means is that it is not merely *secular*. It is not authorized merely implicitly by common human experience of ultimate reality, but also authorized explicitly by special experience of a particular revelation, or re-presentation, of the meaning of ultimate reality for us that claims decisive existential authority. But this means that its teachings about *credenda* and *agenda* can be neither "properly metaphysical" nor "properly moral," since the teachings of both metaphysics and morals proper are precisely secular. Nor does the fact that Christian teachings necessarily *imply* both provide any reason to think and speak otherwise.

I find it all the more interesting (and humbling!), therefore, that I could have so long thought and spoken otherwise, having once come to think about the trinity as I long have. I refer to such thoughts as the following:

"Whether it be a doctrine of the economic trinity or a doctrine of the immanent trinity, a doctrine of the trinity is in any case a properly *theological* doctrine, in that it has to do with the meaning of God for us as distinct from the structure of God in itself" (Notebooks, 22 August 1981; rev. 1 September 2003).

"What does the doctrine of the trinity have to do with metaphysics? I incline to answer, 'Not very much'" (Notebooks, July 1986; rev. 1 September 2003).

"How is the Christian understanding of God as triune properly interpreted?"

"The Christian understanding of God as triune, i.e., as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is properly interpreted as an *existential*, and so a religious, theological, or philosophical, kind of understanding, as distinct from a metaphysical kind. This means that it has entirely to do with the meaning of God for us, as distinct from the structure of God in itself. This is as true, indeed, of the so-called immanent, or 'ontological,' trinity as it is of the so-called economic trinity" (Notebooks, 18 May 1999).

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