

What Sumner understands by "the 'nuanced internalism' of orthodoxy" and "the 'nuanced externalism' of pluralism," which is to say, liberalism, makes his statement that they are mirror images of one another truer than he might wish it was (*The First and the Last*: 50).

Just as he characterizes externalism as setting up some other norm than, or alongside, Jesus Christ, so he characterizes internalism not only as "particularism," but also as "traditionalism" and "orthodoxy." This he does because "the rule of final primacy," on his understanding, is "an 'essential doctrine,' itself entailed in the classical doctrines of Trinity and Christology" (34, n. 49), and so a rule other than, or alongside, the apostolic witness to Jesus as the Christ. It is, in fact, an epitome of "scripture and tradition," or "scripture read and interpreted by the church," and so is not apostolic, but precisely *post*-apostolic tradition. So, as Sumner himself characterizes them, the internalism for which he argues as much as the externalism that he argues against uncritically allows the situation to play a normative role other than, or alongside, that properly played by the sole primary norm of the apostolic witness and its sole primal authorizing source.

In earlier writings I've sometimes distinguished the original revisionary strategy of "double rapprochement," as I've called it, from "fundamentalist preservation," on the one side, and "modernist accomodation," on the other. What Sumner makes clear, however unintentionally, is that these two extreme alternative strategies are, in fact, mirror images of one another—precisely because each, in its way, allows the "situation" to dominate the "message." Of course, it is the mark of the "orthodox" to focus so sharply on the mote in the "revisionary's" eye as to miss the beam in her or his own. But, as Willi Marxsen so often stressed, whenever one holds that some particular interpretation of the Christian witness in the past is the sole adequate interpretation, one allows the past situation in whose terms the interpretation perforce was cast to become lord over the Christian witness, instead of remaining always only its servant, by providing concepts/ terms for more or less adequately interpreting that witness in and for *that* particular situation. To this extent, Karl Barth is exactly right to

insist that theology must always be done anew and *ab ovo*—as a direct response to the apostolic kerygma itself, rather than as a reiteration of some later response to it.

One further thought: the great importance of the two criteria of appropriateness and credibility, rightly understood and applied, is that they guard against the typical mistakes of both orthodox and revisionary theologies. What Christian witness and theology are to be appropriate to is precisely and only Jesus Christ as attested, not by "scripture and tradition," but solely by the formally normative witness of the apostles. And what they are to be credible to is precisely and only human existence as attested, not by this, that, or the other religion or philosophy, but solely by "the 'right' philosophy," i.e., the philosophy(ies) that correctly explicate(s) what is disclosed about human existence by common human experience and reason. Of course, determining either appropriateness or credibility can be done only in some particular situation, in critical discussion with the latest phase of the ongoing Christian tradition as well as with the most recent of humanity's continuing attempts at self-interpretation, religious and philosophical. But, then, the determination is also only for *that* particular situation, not for any that will come only thereafter. As in any other serious pursuit of the truth, whether the truth as it is in Jesus or the truth of human existence, we can only stand by our best judgment, acknowledging openly and unequivocally that we, no less than all who have gone before us or are to come after us, may always be wrong.

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