

*On "the Christian Witness of the Bible"*

I have argued that "an authentically theological way of construing the Bible could only be a special case of historical theology. . . —namely, the special case in which the Christian witness whose meaning is to be critically interpreted is the Christian witness of the Bible" (*Doing Theology Today*: 43). But what is meant, exactly, by "the Christian witness of the Bible"? To speak of "the Christian witness of the *New Testament*" is not obviously problematic, since all of the NT writings can be critically interpreted as at least descriptively bearing witness to Jesus Christ and, therefore, as at least descriptively Christian witness. But can the OT writings also be critically interpreted in this way, as *Christian* witness?

They can, it would seem, if, and only if, one may make a certain use of the distinction between explicit and implicit Christian witness.

One use of this distinction is to distinguish, as I am wont to do, between the explicit Christian witness borne by Christian religious praxis, on the one hand, and the implicit Christian witness borne by all the rest of Christian life-praxis, insofar as it, too, though "secular" rather than "religious," is explicitly mediated by the Christian religion, on the other. On this use, one's witness is properly said to be implicitly Christian insofar as what one does, or how one does it, in bearing witness follows from one's self-understanding as a Christian in response to Jesus' call and is by way of actualizing this self-understanding. Thus, to do justice in relation to others, both within society and culture and with respect to maintaining and/or transforming social and cultural structures, is to bear implicit Christian witness, because, or insofar as, acting in this way follows from, and in this sense is implied by, one's self-understanding as a Christian.

But there is another use of the same distinction, to distinguish between, on the one hand, Christian witness explicitly as such, together with all that follows from it and, therefore, is implicit Christian witness in the first sense, and, on the other hand, the necessary presuppositions of Christian witness as well as of all that follows from it. Thus, to bear witness to God as the God of history and to women and men as all called by God to take responsibility, under God, for what happens in history is to bear an implicit Christian witness in this second sense, since the reality of God and the responsibility of human beings so understood

are necessary presuppositions of explicit Christian witness as well as of everything that follows from it.

It is by using the distinction in this second sense that it seems to me to be possible to interpret the OT writings critically as implicit Christian witness. They are implicit Christian witness and, insofar, Christian witness, because, or insofar as, they formulate the necessary presuppositions of explicit Christian witness.

But doesn't any other religious tradition more or less adequately formulate these same necessary presuppositions? Indeed, it does; and this is why it, too, may be said to be insofar implicit Christian witness in the same second sense. But is this to admit, then, that the OT writings are (implicit) Christian witness *only* in the sense in which those of any other religious tradition may be said to be so?

No, it is not to admit this. The OT writings are implicit Christian witness in a distinctive sense because, or insofar as, they not only formulate the necessary presuppositions of explicit Christian witness as any other religious tradition may do so, but are also the primary source of *the particular way of formulating these presuppositions assumed by the apostolic witness*, which alone is formally normative for all Christian witness, implicit as well as explicit. In other words, the OT writings are the primary source, not only of the necessary *presuppositions* of the constitutive christological and theological assertions, but also of the contingent *assumptions* made in formulating these assertions in the way in which the apostolic witness, for reconstructing which the NT writings are the primary source, in fact formulates them. Therefore, although the Christian witness of the apostles alone is formally normative for validating all other Christian witness, implicit as well as explicit, the particular way of formulating the necessary presuppositions of this witness that uniquely provided the contingent assumptions actually made in formulating it shares in its formal normativeness. Insofar, then, as the OT writings are the primary source of this way of formulating these necessary presuppositions, they, too, are implicit Christian witness in a distinctive sense, different from that in which any other religious tradition may be said to be so.

What is properly meant, then, by "the Christian witness of the Bible" is both the explicit Christian witness of the NT writings and the implicit Christian

witness of the OT writings, insofar as the witness they bear can be critically interpreted as implicitly Christian in the relevant, which is to say, second, sense of the words.

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