

The unique authority of the apostolic witness is the authority of the particular formulation of the Christian witness that is earliest, i.e., original and originating. The unique authority of the assumptions made in formulating the apostolic witness is the authority of the particular formulation of the existential *question* to which this earliest, original and originating, witness presents itself as the *answer*.

But if the apostolic witness derives its authority solely from Jesus Christ as its explicit primal authorizing source, it must be solely from this same source that the assumptions made in formulating the witness also derive their authority as formulating the existential question to which the witness gives answer. Conversely, if the only Jesus Christ who is the explicit primal authorizing source of all Christian faith and witness, including the apostles's, is the Jesus Christ attested by their witness, the only question to which any Christian witness can present itself as the answer is the existential question formulated in the assumptions made in formulating the apostles's witness, however much this question may subsequently need to be reformulated.

If the question is asked, then, as to the authority of scripture, the answer must be that the (secondary) authority of the NT writings derives from the (primary) authority of the apostolic witness, even as the (secondary) authority of the OT writings derives from the primary authority of the assumptions made in formulating the apostles's witness. Thus a NT writing is authoritative because, or insofar as, its reformulation of the apostolic witness in response to the questions and terms of its situation is appropriate to the Jesus attested by the apostolic witness. On the other hand, an OT writing is authoritative because, or insofar as, its formulation of the existential question in response to the questions and in the terms of its situation is appropriate to the question formulated in the assumptions made in formulating the apostolic witness.

As for my claim that, even on the assumption that it is the witness of the apostles that is the real Christian canon, scripture nonetheless retains a unique place over against all of the rest of Christian tradition—namely, because it is the primary source of this witness (in the case of the NT writings) and the primary source of the assumptions made in formulating it (in the case of the OT writings)—two comments are pertinent.

First of all, it is important to distinguish between the necessary *presuppositions* of the apostolic witness and the *assumptions* made in formulating it—the first being the conditions logically necessary to the meaning and truth of the assertion(s) of which the witness is a particular formulation, and the second, whatever was in fact taken for granted (empirically as well as existentially) in so formulating it.

Secondly, then, there is an important shift in the meaning of the phrase "primary source" from saying that the NT writings are the primary source of the apostolic witness to saying that the OT writings are the primary source of the assumptions made in formulating it. In the first case, "primary source" means the primary source from which the apostolic witness has to be reconstructed by following up the various lines of tradition documented by the NT writings back behind the writings themselves to the witness prior to them of which they are all later reformulations. In the second case, "primary source" means the source from which the assumptions made in formulating the apostolic witness themselves derived as a later reformulation or development. Of course, in both cases, "primary source" means, more exactly, "primary *empirical-historical* source"; and in both cases, there is a movement from the sources themselves to that of which they are the sources. But in the one case this is a movement *backward* by way of historical reconstruction, whereas in the other case, it is a movement *forward* by way of historical derivation.

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