

On Faith in Scripture, etc.

What is really at stake in the claim that "the original church's consciousness of the faith, which is the constitutive beginning of the church as a whole . . . has been objectified in an authentic and pure way in Holy Scripture" (Rahner, Foundations of Christian Faith: 377)?

On the face of it, one would appear to be able to object, in principle, that the objectification of the original church's consciousness of faith, which is given in Holy Scripture, is not authentic and pure--in which case, it's not clear to me how one would go about defending the original claim. (Of course, it's not any more clear how one would go about supporting this kind of possible objection to it.) In any event, the original claim as made seems to be the kind of claim that would allow--and require--this sort of discussion, because it would allow--and require--the kind of doubt or question that only such discussion would in principle be able to remove, however difficult or impossible it might be in fact to conduct such discussion.

But suppose that the claim made about the purity and authenticity of scripture's objectification of the original church's consciousness of faith follows directly from the fact that what one properly means by "the original church's consciousness of the faith" is precisely the consciousness of faith objectified in scripture. Clearly, if this is what one means by this phrase, there can be no question whether the objectification in scripture is authentic and pure. Nor is the sort of discussion previously considered so much as allowed for, much less required.

I submit that the claim made for any primary authority is logically this kind of a claim. Its "purity," "authenticity," etc., are all functions of the fact that while it is indeed authorized by a source beyond itself, this authorizing source is available as such only through this authority.

I should think that the same sort of reason would apply to the claim that the church is founded by Christ, i.e., that the essential constitution of the church conforms to Christ. If this claim is valid, surely, the reason is that what one means by Christ is that to which the essential constitution of the church is conformed--in the sense of John Knox's claim that, if Christians are those who remember Jesus, Jesus is the one whom Christians remember.