

## *On the Distinction between "Asserting" and "Assuming"*

It is clear that this distinction has an important application to the christological problem, as I point out in *The Point of Christology*, Chs. 3 and 4. But it obviously has a much broader application to the theological problem generally.

This is so, at any rate, if one construes "asserting" broadly enough to include "implying," or, alternatively, makes a threefold distinction between "asserting" and "implying," on the one hand, and "assuming," on the other. For, clearly, the assumptions we human beings make in asserting or implying the constitutive christological and theological assertions or any of the other assertions of Christian witness and theology are by no means exhausted simply by such empirical-historical assumptions as we may make about Jesus. They also include all the other assumptions that go to make up our self-understanding and life-praxis as human beings—metaphysical and moral as well as scientific and technological, practical, and emancipatory. But for our making such assumptions we would have no preunderstanding of the Christian witness, which is addressed directly to our self-understanding and indirectly to our life-praxis as human beings. At the same time, any Christian witness sufficiently elaborated to address us effectively at both of these levels—of self-understanding and life-praxis—must perforce be involved in making the same range of assumptions.

Even so, what makes one a Christian is not what one assumes in asserting or implying the constitutive christological and theological assertions and the other assertions of Christian witness and theology, but rather what one asserts or necessarily implies in asserting or implying any of these assertions. Therefore, one not only may but must be critical of what is assumed in bearing or receiving the Christian witness, as distinct from what is asserted or implied in bearing or receiving it.

Relative to what is assumed intellectually with respect both to self-understanding and life-praxis, one is thus critical by way of demythologizing

and existentialist interpretation, so understood and developed as to avoid reducing talk about ultimate reality simply to talk about ourselves. Relative to what is assumed practically with respect both to self-understanding and life-praxis, one is thus critical by way of deideologizing and political interpretation, so understood and developed as to avoid reducing talk about changing social and cultural structures simply to talk about changing the external, objective structures of society and culture themselves, while ignoring or neglecting the subjective internalizations of these structures by individuals.

If to carry out the first of these two critical tasks, one must depend on an independent philosophical theology or metaphysics, to carry out the second, one must depend on an equally independent critical social science comprising psychoanalysis as well as critique of ideology and organized in terms of an independent philosophical ethics. One is also dependent, indirectly if not directly, on natural science and empirical social science and history, which are *eo ipso* demythologizing, in that they eliminate myth, just as one is also dependent on existentialist history, which is likewise demythologizing, albeit by interpreting myth instead of by eliminating it.

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