

What is involved in answering the call to bear adequate Christian witness?

Answering the call to bear adequate Christian witness involves basically two things. On the one hand, it involves *interpreting and reformulating* the witness that the church has already borne so that it will be credible to human existence and also fitting to the new situation. On the other hand, it involves *disciplining and reforming* the witness that the church is presently to bear so that it will be appropriate to Jesus Christ in the same situation.

To do either of these things self-critically requires also doing Christian theology. And even when that requirement is met, there remains the trick of keeping both objectives in mind without neglecting either for the sake of the other.

December 1985; re. 8 September 2003; 23 July 2006; 22 June 2009

In order to discharge our primary responsibility as Christians to bear valid witness to Jesus Christ in and for the world, we must always:

(1) *interpret* and *reformulate* normative Christian witness, including even the formally normative witness of the apostles; and

(2) *discipline* and *reform* our own Christian witness by reference to the same normative Christian witness, and primarily the formally normative witness of the apostles.

But to do any of these things presupposes discharging our secondary responsibility to do theology, in the sense of critically reflecting on our witness, as well as on that of Christians generally, by critically interpreting it and then critically validating its claims to be valid Christian witness.

What am I called to do by the Christian witness?

First of all, I am called to believe *in* God *through* Jesus Christ *with* the apostles, as well as with those who bear the witness and all the others whose witness agrees with the formally normative witness of the apostles and, therefore, is itself substantially normative; and then

Secondly, I am called to bear this same witness in my own right and on my own responsibility (1) by making their witness *really mine* by *interpreting* and *reformulating* it in terms of my own **experience** and **reason**; and (2) by seeing to it that my witness is *really Christian* by *disciplining* and *reforming* it by the normative witness borne in their different ways by **scripture** and **tradition**, in the sense of the formally normative witness of the apostles and the substantially normative witness of all who are in agreement with them.

September 1987; rev. February 1995

1. We have a twofold responsibility as Christians: (1) to bear valid witness to Jesus Christ in and for the world; and, as the means necessary to doing this, (2) to do theology, in the sense of critically reflecting on our witness, as well as on that of Christians generally, by both critically interpreting it and critically validating its claims to be valid Christian witness.

2. By the same token, Christian education in the broadest sense of the words has two main aspects: (1) education in bearing valid witness and in making proper use of the valid witness borne by others, which is what is usually called "Christian education"; and (2) education in doing theology, in the sense of critically reflecting on bearing witness by both critically interpreting it and critically validating its claims, which is what is properly called "theological education."