

Second Thoughts on *On Theology*

8—The last sentence in the first paragraph of the explication of Thesis 6 should end, not with the word "witness," but with the word "religion." The use of "witness" actually makes the statement circular—or else leaves "this witness" without any clear antecedent. This is why the parallel formulation on 86 is to be preferred, although it uses neither "witness" nor "religion" and merely implies the second. Actually, what makes either kind of witness, explicit or implicit, Christian is that it is shaped by faith in Jesus Christ. But since the apostles are the only Christian witnesses whose witness is shaped immediately by Jesus Christ, it is correct to say that, in the case of all other Christians, implicit, as distinct from explicit, Christian witness is the rest of human culture insofar as it is shaped by the Christian religion.—Better: ". . . together with the rest of human life-praxis and culture so far as they have been shaped by the faith of which this religion is the explicit expression." Cf. 86, where, similarly, the phrase, "as well as the rest of human life and culture so far as historically shaped thereby," should be, rather, "as well as the rest of human life-praxis and culture so far as they have been shaped historically by the faith made explicit as the Christian religion."

12—I evidently confuse two questions here: (1) whether consideration of method as much as consideration of content is a properly theological, rather than a pretheological, matter; and (2) whether the question of method and the question of content are one question rather than two. Unless an affirmative answer to the second question means no more than—is simply another (less happy) way of formulating—an affirmative answer to the first, I now doubt that an affirmative answer to the second question can be defended. Although whether I am or am not justified in holding to a certain understanding of theological method must indeed be decided by invoking the same criteria (and the same specific requirements of the same criteria) as must be invoked to decide whether I am or am not justified in holding to a certain understanding of, say, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, it seems—and I strongly suspect is—needlessly paradoxical to claim that in making the first decision I thereby make the second. I fear, however, that there was a time when I was not nearly as clear about this as I hope I am now. And the formulation here would appear to provide evidence of such confusion even

if all that the argument being developed here requires is an affirmative answer to the first question, however one is to answer the second.
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38-41—Whether *x is necessary* is one question, whether *x can be necessary*, another. What my argument here establishes, if it establishes anything, is only that decisive revelation in the specifically Christian sense *can be necessary*, not that it *is necessary*. In other words, what my argument shows is that human beings as such need not only original revelation but a full and adequate objectification of original revelation, and thus a special revelation that may validly claim to be decisive for their existence (40). But even if one assumes, as I do, that Christian revelation is, in fact, what it purports to be—namely, the full and adequate objectification of human existence in its authentic possibility (41)—the conclusion one is entitled to draw is not that human beings simply as such, quite apart from a decision for specifically Christian existence, have need of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, but, simply, that they have need of *some* special revelation, whether the Christian or some other that could also validly claim to be decisive. Of course, for Christians, it is Jesus and Jesus alone who plays or ever could play the role of decisive revelation—just this being constitutive of being, or what it means to be, a Christian. But it is clear from my whole argument—from both its beginning and its ending (39, 41)—that it is directed toward claiming that, in some sense, specifically Christian revelation *is necessary* not only for Christians but for human beings generally. On the other hand, it is also clear that my argument establishes at most that specifically Christian revelation *can be* thus necessary to human beings simply as such, its being actually necessary to them being contingent upon their not yet having been confronted with a special revelation that can validly make the same claim to be decisive. Consequently, the first full paragraph on this page needs to be rewritten, so as to claim, not that specifically Christian revelation *is necessary*, but only that it *can be necessary*, to human beings simply as such, because or insofar as they have need of a full and adequate objectification of their existence such as they have not otherwise encountered.

66-68—The difficulty with my argument here is that I fail to distinguish between the *assumptions* necessarily made in formulating the Jesus-kerygma

and the necessary *presuppositions* of the assertion of which the Jesus-kerygma is the earliest formulation. Instead of making this distinction, I talk throughout of "presuppositions," saying nothing whatever about "assumptions," even though "presuppositions," as I carelessly use it, is sometimes used to refer to what had been better called "assumptions" (as, e.g., when I represent the phrase, "the most fundamental presuppositions . . . of the Jesus-kerygma," as but a verbally different way of speaking about "the particular linguistic form of the question . . . of the ultimate meaning of human existence to which the Jesus-kerygma presents itself as the answer" [66 f.]), while at other times I use it to refer to what are, indeed, properly "presuppositions" (as, e.g., when I say that "there logically cannot be any sharp distinction . . . between the necessary presuppositions of a religious assertion and the assertion itself" [67 f.]). Obviously, I failed to make the distinction called for here because I was not sufficiently aware of it. But that I was, in fact, groping toward it is clear from my speaking of "the particular linguistic form of the question of human existence" (cf. "the conceptual form of the Jesus-kerygma" [67], or "the particular form of the existential question to which the Jesus-kerygma is the answer" [68]), which evidently presupposes a distinction between the existential question itself or as such and a particular linguistic or conceptual form of the question. And, significantly, it is not simply because they document the existential question, but, rather, because or insofar as they document "*the particular linguistic form of the existential question,*" etc. that I say that the OT writings are "authoritative for determining the appropriateness of theological assertions" (68). On the other hand, because I fail to make the distinction, I make it difficult for my reader to understand what I do and do not mean to say. Specifically, I leave open the possibility of saying that, since the Christian community already in the NT has made other non-OT, or non-apocalypticist, assumptions in formulating the constitutive christological assertion, the peculiar place of the OT writings in the tradition of Christian witness and theology is merely accidental, not essential. The only way to close out this possibility is to distinguish sufficiently clearly between the necessary presuppositions of the christological assertion and the assumptions necessarily made in originally formulating it that the OT writings can be seen to have the peculiar place I claim for them because or insofar as they are the primary source not merely of the presuppositions that *would have to be made* in making this assertion but also

of the assumptions that *in fact were made* in formulating it in the Jesus-kerygma. (Cf. E.M. Adams, "The Philosophical Grounds of the Present Crisis of Authority," in *Authority: A Philosophical Analysis*, ed. R. Baine Harris [University, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1976]: 11 f.: ". . . we need to distinguish between philosophical assumptions and presuppositions. For our purposes, we may regard an assumption as a belief taken for granted and built on as a premise or ground in one's thinking about something else; whereas a presupposition is a necessary condition for the truth or meaningfulness of some sentence. A philosophical assumption on which a scientific or normative theory is built will be presupposed by that theory. But not all philosophical presuppositions make their entry via assumption. Those that do not are the basic ones that provide the ultimate touchstone for philosophy. If a philosophical theory is assumed or taken for granted and thereby shapes the development of a given area of thought, the rejection of that theory in favor of another, whether brought about by philosophical inquiry or otherwise, would work a radical change in the cultural area concerned. On the other hand, the philosophical presuppositions of our primary ways of experiencing, thinking, and talking, those that do not enter the fabric of experience and thought via assumption, cannot be rejected by virtue of inconsistency with philosophical theory. Whenever such inconsistencies arise, so much the worse for the philosophical theory. This is why philosophy must be primarily responsible to the philosophical presuppositions of ordinary discourse rather than those of the specialized disciplines. The latter are more likely to have been influenced by philosophical assumptions pervasive in the culture. Although philosophy does not contradict specific statements in science or judgments in normative thought, it may overturn them by contradicting philosophical assumptions on which they are based.")

110—True as it is that "religion never exists in general, any more than any other form of culture does, but always only as *a* religion, which has its origin and principle in some particular occasion of insight," and that, therefore, "the only thing directly accessible to us when we speak of 'religion' is some particular religion or religions, some particular way or ways of conceiving and symbolizing ourselves and our world in relation to the mystery encompassing our existence," it is *not* true that "even the true religion, if there be such a thing, . . . could only be one particular religion among others,"

etc. The truth in what is stated here is that, since religion in general or simply as such can exist only as some particular religion or religions, the same must be true of the true religion, if there be any such thing: it, too, can exist only as some particular religion or religions. But if this truth is in part stated by what is said here, and even if it is certainly what is intended by what is said, there is another, important part of this truth that is, in fact, denied by the statement that even the true religion "could only be one particular religion among others." For this statement can be reasonably understood to mean that, if there be such a thing as the true religion, there is only one particular religion that it can be; and this is not true but false, assuming the truth in question. Given the necessary conditions of the possibility of there being any religion at all, there can also be such a thing as the true religion, and there can be more than one particular religion as which the true religion exists (or perhaps we should say, in which the true religion *subsists*, following the formulation of Vatican Council II concerning the subsistence of the true church in the Roman Catholic Church). Therefore, the last two sentences should be reformulated as follows: "Consequently, even the true religion, if there be such a thing, could not be identified with religion in general or simply as such. It could only be some particular religion or religions among others, distinguished from all the rest solely by the unique adequacy with which its or their particular concepts and symbols answered to the need that each religion exists to meet."—That I fully intended to say nothing other than this—granting that I said it only in part, while in part denying it—should be clear enough from my statement at the beginning of the paragraph that religion always exists "only as *a* religion," which likewise is literally false, since religion always exists only as a religion or religions.

60—The statement here is mistaken that, in the unique case of the primary authority, "the distinction that necessarily remains between any theological authority and that which authorizes it is no longer also a *temporal* distinction between a later witness and an earlier one, but is the strictly *hermeneutical* distinction between what is said and what is meant in these earliest traditions of witness themselves." This statement mistakenly collapses two distinctions that need to be kept distinct—namely, the properly *hermeneutical* distinction between what is said and what is meant and the properly *semantic* distinction between ^{both} an assertion (what is meant) and the formulation of the assertion (what is said), on the one hand, and the truth or reality that the assertion, if true, asserts, on the other. It is clearly the second distinction, not the first, that I had reason to contrast with a temporal distinction between a later and an earlier witness.