

It occurs to me that Marxsen's denial of any control, or touchstone, for testing Jesus' claim may mean only that, wherever what is put in question by a certain claim is what really is the explicit primal *source* of authority, there cannot be, in the nature of the case, any such control or touchstone, i.e., any *authority*, properly so-called, by reference to which the validity of the claim can be tested.

But if this clarifies the nature of Jesus' claim—as a claim to be the explicit primal ontic *source* of authority, as distinct from merely *an*, or even *the*, authority—it still fails to do justice to the uniquely authoritative function of experience and reason even in cases such as this. "So," Marxsen infers, "there was no possibility of testing the truth of Jesus' claim. One could only risk accepting Jesus' words" (*ET*: 217). But, surely, the whole point of Jn 7:17, which he proceeds to cite, is that there is not just one way of experiencing the truth of Jesus' assertion (that his teaching is not his, but the One's who sent him), but two. Not only the one who risks accepting Jesus' words, but also the one who wills to do God's will shall know that Jesus' teaching is from God.

Even so, I need to think through more carefully what is, and is not, involved in the whole notion of "the risk of faith." I perhaps especially need to retrieve certain insights expressed in some of my earlier work but not apparent in the more recent.

I am thinking, for example, of *Christ without Myth*: 139 f., where, in response to the question whether "consistent demythologization (or existential[ist] interpretation) is at least permitted, if not demanded, by the revealed word of God," I advise remembering "that, by its very nature, every attempt to answer this question must finally presuppose itself. To answer it, we must establish, first of all, what this revealed word of God is; and yet to do this is obviously impossible except by employing the very method thereby to be justified. In other words, we cannot escape the fact that all theological argument [*sc.* for the appropriateness of claims], like all philosophical argument, is circular. As Whitehead remarks, 'the sole appeal is to intuition'; and this means, among other things, that the method of a theology and its content are mutually interdependent."

Or, again, in "On Revelation" (OT: 22 f.), I say rather similar things, only, in this case, I extend them to cover testing the credibility as well as the appropriateness of theological statements. Because "'the witness of the apostles that is contained in the New Testament' is rather the object of theological interpretation than its datum . . . all attempts to test the appropriateness of systematic statements are bound to be circular." But, then, something similar holds good in testing their credibility. "To determine whether such general criteria of truth as one must invoke to apply it [*sc.* the further criterion of credibility] are in fact what they purport to be involves one in yet another 'hermeneutical circle,' from which there likewise is no escape."

Also relevant, presumably, is the brief discussion of "the risk of faith" in "The Task of Philosophical Theology" (90). "This notion," I say, "is usually taken to mean that, insofar as Christian faith is an understanding of one's existence to which there are in some sense real alternatives, it involves a choice, and so is in that respect a risk. Specifically, it is the risk that the basic truth of human existence is as it is represented to be in the witness of faith to Jesus Christ that is the Christian special revelation. . . . But to recognize this is to see. . . why Christian theology is necessarily dependent. . . on an integral theistic metaphysics. For how can the venture of faith be reflectively confirmed, or theology's assertions rationally justified, except on the basis of just such a metaphysics?"

On the face of it, this passage may seem to imply—contrary to what is expressly said, in one way or another, in both of the other passages—that, while Christian faith (as well as, in its way, Christian theology) involves a risk or venture, this is not true of metaphysics or philosophy. But I rather doubt that any such implication could be fairly taken to follow, in the light of what is said in the immediate context (85, 88) about Christian faith and theology, on the one hand, and our common faith as human beings and philosophy, on the other. "[J]ust as philosophy is the fully reflective understanding of our common faith simply as selves, so Christian theology . . . is the attempt to become fully self-conscious about specifically Christian faith." But "philosophy and Christian theology are not only closely analogous but because of the peculiar relation between their respective objects, between

our basic existential faith and specifically Christian faith, also overlap or in a certain way coincide. From this it follows that Christian theology necessarily presupposes philosophy . . . in the quite particular form of philosophical theology or theistic metaphysics. Because theology and philosophy by their very natures finally lay claim to the same basic ground, appeal to the same historical evidence—in short, serve an identical ultimate truth—their material conclusions must be in the last analysis mutually confirming if either is to sustain its essential claim. This does not mean, of course, that their complete mutual confirmation must be actually realized, either now or at sometime in the future. The essentially historical character of reflection, not to mention such other constants of the human equation as finitude and sin, hardly permits this as a real possibility. We simply have to reckon with the indefinite continuation of our present more or less irreducible pluralism of philosophical and theological positions. But in doing so, we have no reason whatever to set aside the ideal that philosophy and theology alike establish as governing their relationship—even though we have the best of reasons for suspecting all claims to have already realized this ideal. So long as philosophy is a serious undertaking it involves the confidence, which it attempts to justify, that the truth of its material conclusions can only be confirmed by any true conclusions of Christian theology—and theology, naturally, involves and seeks to justify a corresponding confidence about the confirmation of its conclusions by those of philosophy."

It hardly seems too much to say that the only view consistent with this general understanding is that philosophy, no less than theology, involve^s a risk, or venture, and that, for the first as much as the second (both as dogmatics *and* as apologetics), Whitehead's observation holds good: "the sole appeal is to intuition." I also recall Hartshorne's statement, "In philosophical matters, as in religious, each is on his own. Each must take his chances with his own judgment, since the experts do not agree. One either chooses an expert to trust, or tries to decide the issue directly."

17 September 1999