

Mark Galli, October 20, 2017

editor in chief of Christianity Today

and author of the recently released book on [a noted 20th Century theologian]

I knew that _____, arguably the greatest Protestant theologian of the 20th century, had a decades-long affair with his personal assistant.... But I didn't know some of the details. As the saying goes, the devil is in the details, and the details were deeply disappointing.

...What floored me now was especially the rationale _____ used to justify the relationship.

...Let me explain a little more deeply why the revelations about _____ are such a problem. Because it's not a matter of him being confirmed as a sinner. That would not suggest the depth of the problem.

...One of the major points of my book was that _____ can help us ground our theology in the revelation of Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture—and *not in our subjective experience*. That was a problem with the 19th-century liberalism _____ reacted against. It was that subjectivism that defined religions as “the feeling of dependence” and which got swept up in a patriotism that equated that euphoria with the will of God. This is what prompted liberal theologians—many of whom had taught _____—to support the German war effort in World War I. This so rattled _____, he was compelled to rethink theology from the ground up (or better, from the revelation of God down).

But it is that very subjectivism that _____ fell into himself, more or less saying that his relationship with felt so good, so right, it had to come from God: “It cannot just be the devil’s work,” he wrote _____. “It *must* have some meaning and a right to live. ... I love you and do not see any chance to stop this.”

Then he employs his theological method to justify the affair. Rather than a strict logic that moves from point A to point B and then a conclusion, _____ believed deeper truth always stood in a dialectic. One example: Jesus is God *and* man. Another: God is both judge *and* savior. These truths are not easily reconciled but are better understood as existing in some tension. _____ used this method fruitfully to explore many mysteries of the Christian faith.

But when it came to his personal life, we see the limits of this method. Tietz [the author of a new book with personal letters of _____] summarizes how _____ understood things: _____ interprets his own situation theologically as standing in tension between “order” and that which “has come upon us unintentionally out of the mysterious guilty depth of the human,” between “the holiness of the command,” and “that you [_____] and I (I don’t know on which level) are together between the right and the ‘natural event.’”

In other words, he’s saying that he and _____ had no choice but to live in this dialectical tension between obeying God’s command about marital fidelity and what felt right to them.

...he justified the affair *on the very grounds that substantially contradict his theological project as well as his theological method*. And did so year after year after year.

....it is only natural that theologians will use their theological method to justify their illicit behavior. All of us use any logic available to justify our sins. Self-justification is so woven into the fabric of our souls, it's a lifetime effort to root it out. In fact, we can be sure that we will never rid ourselves of it completely.

...But the ideal of humility demonstrates how base and demeaning human arrogance is.

...Like many, I've long hoped to find a heroic human figure whom I can admire unflinchingly. But time and again, I've had to discover there is no such person.

Well, except the one known as the True Man, who dialectically enough has been known to use ignoble things to shine forth his glory.