

Abstract

The topic of this study is the proleptic theology of Ted Peters, also called prolepticism, which opens new ways to relate theology, science, and ethics through the concept of prolepsis, and is therefore interesting as a contemporary theological program. Prolepticism claims that the eschatological future reveals itself beforehand in the prolepsis – a foretaste of the future kingdom – most importantly in the Christ-event, in the gracious life and resurrection of Jesus. However, prolepsis is also manifest in other events and actions where the values and principles of the future kingdom are realized in present history.

The aim of this study is to analyze Peters' theology of prolepsis, which has previously not been thoroughly explored. The method used is systematic analysis comprising a close reading of the sources, identification of the essential concepts therein, and their ordered presentation so as to provide a critical overview of proleptic theology.

The study presents prolepticism as a tripartite structure of theology, science, and ethics, making it a systematic theory of God, reality, and humanity: a comprehensive eschatological vision of the whole of reality. Theologically, prolepticism seemed to be most convincing when talking about creation, eschatology, and ethics. The Christological question is more difficult to answer in a proleptic way, because the nature and person of Christ have little eschatological meaning.

Peters presents a new mode of interaction between science and theology called hypothetical consonance, which suggests that because science and theology study the same reality, they must be increasingly in consonance in the future. This study, on the other hand, suggests that the concept of hypothetical consonance would be more plausible if, instead of a total disavowal of the two-language theory, it accepted that the domains of theology and science only overlap partially. Another problem with hypothetical consonance lies at the very core of prolepticism: the view of the future where there seems to be an irreconcilable dissonance rather than consonance between science and theology.

Proleptic ethics begins with envisioning the future as promised by God, and continues by asking how we can make that future become more real in the present world. Therefore it greets with pleasure every effort to advance the sense of a global peaceful community, ecological sustainability, justice, equality, freedom, and the care for the all-inclusive welfare of future generations. According to this study, proleptic ethics possesses four ethical categories: theological ethics, situation ethics, teleological ethics, and eschatological ethics.

This study concludes that from the viewpoint of logical reasoning prolepticism is a possible way to see reality, but the final verification test of this theory is the future. Certainly there seems to be an opportunity for some sort of verification if the history of nature seems to proceed towards the divinely promised future. However, this is the weakest point of prolepticism: it cannot bring together the future of the universe from the viewpoints of both theology and scientific cosmology.

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