

Proposal to be considered: theology in the generic sense can and should be defined as the critical theory of self-understanding and life-praxis explicitly mediated by religion.

Considerations supporting this proposal include:

(1) To be human is both to understand oneself and to engage in a complex and many-sided life-praxis.

(2) The function of culture generally is to mediate such self-understanding and life-praxis, in the exact sense of providing the media, or means, for them in the form of concepts and symbols.

(3) The distinctive function of religion as one primary form of culture among others is to mediate self-understanding and life-praxis by providing the concepts and symbols through which authentic self-understanding is explicitly re-presented.

(4) Thus *a* religion is "a cultural system" (Geertz) through which the existential question of how we are to understand ourselves authentically can be explicitly asked and answered.

(5) Correspondingly, *a* theology may be defined as the critical reflection constituted by the question as to the validity of the claims of a specific religion to mediate authentic self-understanding and the life-praxis implied thereby, i.e., true (metaphysical) belief and right (moral and political) action.

(6) In this sense, theology can and should be defined generically as the critical theory of self-understanding and life-praxis explicitly mediated by religion.

(7) The obvious advantage of such a definition, as compared with my definition of it in certain places as the "higher level of reflection to which the claims of a particular religion may possibly be subjected" (*On Theology*: 116), is that it more closely corresponds to my definition of Christian theology as

the critical theory of Christian faith and witness, not simply of the Christian religion (cf. also 117; and *Doing Theology Today*: 38 f.).

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