

How should I use the concept/term "decisive"?

In *On Theology*: 125 f., I claim that "it is characteristic of religion generically, and hence of every specific religion, to claim tacitly or openly to bear the decisive revelation of the God, or the decisive re-presentation of the ultimate reality, that is ubiquitous or omnipresent in all our spontaneous experience and more or less truthfully explicated in every other specific religion." In this connection, I speak of "the decisive authority that each religion claims for its own thinking and speaking over against all other specific religions." At the same time, I distinguish between "specifically Christian thinking and speaking," on the one hand, and "what they in turn specify as [formally] normative or canonical," on the other (128).

Because of this claim to decisive authority, any religion as such has a distinctive structure that may be analyzed both diachronically and synchronically. Analyzed diachronically, it has (1) an explicit primal source of authority; (2) the primary authority authorized by this source, which is formally normative for everything else in the religion; and (3) everything else in the religion, including everything in it having secondary authority, because, or insofar as, being authorized by the primary authority, it is itself substantially normative. Analyzed synchronically, a religion has (1) its constitutive principle, which is identical with its explicit primal source of authority; and (2) the various re-presentations of this constitutive principle—oral, enacted, and written—which function as the means of actualizing itself as the religion it is.

The key is to remember that a religion exists concretely as a *community* of human beings whose human faith has acquired a particular historical form. Thus, considered diachronically, the religion in question exists concretely as the cumulative tradition of the community of human beings as which it exists. On the other hand, considered synchronically, the religion in question exists as this

same community constituted as such together with whatever it in turn constitutes as representative means for actualizing itself as thus constituted.

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