Presuppositions Necessary to Understanding the First Article

I presuppose, first, that our common experience simply as human beings has two distinguishable, if also inseparable, aspects or dimensions. It is not only or primarily what I call our "*empirical* experience," our experience from without, as it were, of the variable details of our existence in its immediate setting in the world around us. It is also, and first of all, our "*existential* experience," our experience from within, of our own existence in its ultimate setting as invariably an existence together with others—other persons and other things—as all alike parts of the mysterious whole of reality encompassing us.

I then presuppose, second, that insofar as our experience as human beings is precisely that—*human* experience—it is also *understanding* experience; for to live humanly, at the distinctively human level, is to live not only feelingly, as other animals do, but also understandingly. And this, of course, is also why we do not simply live our lives, but rather (as we say) lead them—within limits, freely and responsibly.

For us as mere parts of reality to live thus understandingly, however—and this is my third presupposition—is for us to live *questioningly*, by not only asking, but *having* to ask, all sorts of vital questions about ourselves in both the immediate and the ultimate settings of our lives. Although we never fail to experience and understand ourselves somehow in both of these settings, we always experience and understand only partially, and so always with questions as yet unanswered about all that we do not understand.

Included among these vital questions that we find ourselves asking and trying to answer simply because we're human is what I, along with others before me, call the *existential* question. By this I mean what I take to be the most vital of all our vital questions—namely, our question about the meaning of our existence in its ultimate setting as a part, together with others, of the all-encompassing whole of reality. My fourth presupposition, then, is that to be a human being at all is to be engaged somehow, implicitly if not explicitly, in asking this existential question.

Once, however, this existential question becomes explicit, by being asked and answered in particular concepts and symbols, it can well be called "the *religious* question." The reason for this, my fifth, presupposition is what I understand to be properly meant by "religion." In a completely general, purely formal sense applicable to any of the particular religions, "religion" refers to the primary form of culture, or "cultural system" (Clifford Geertz), i.e., the concepts and symbols, in which individuals living in a given society and culture ordinarily ask and answer their existential question.

My sixth presupposition, then, is that, among the several different main types of religion is what may be called "*theistic* religion," or, simply, "theism." By this is meant the way of explicitly asking and answering the existential question for which the constitutive concept/symbol, in Greek, is "*theos*," in English, "God." Insofar, then, as such theistic religion develops to the point of what I should distinguish as "monotheism," or, more exactly, "radical monotheism," the concept/symbol "God" is used to refer to nothing other or less than reality as such. God is thus the one all-encompassing whole of reality of which everything else is a part and that all of us as human beings invariably experience and understand at least implicitly insofar as we experience or understand anything at all.

My seventh and—for our purposes here—final presupposition is that this point of religious development had already been reached by the societies and cultures in whose concepts and symbols the first article of the Apostles' Creed, and the Creed as a whole, was formulated. Both among Jews, particularly Jews of the diaspora, and also among enlightened gentiles, "God" had come to be used in the radically monotheistic sense to refer, not to one being among many, not even the highest or the greatest, but to *the* being—the being that is somehow all being because it is the unique, all-encompassing whole of reality of which all beings are parts and in which each being has both its primal source and its final end. Thus, when Paul, for one, speaks of God in 1 Corinthians 8:6, he speaks of "one God the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, " "we" here referring, I think, to human beings generally as well as to Christians in particular. Or, again, in Romans 11:36, Paul presupposes that the God who is to be glorified forever is the One *from* whom and *through* whom and *for* whom are all things.—I don't know about

you, but, so far as I'm concerned, if this isn't as good a definition of the one all-encompassing whole of reality as you're likely to find, it'll certainly do until such a definition comes along.