

*A Philosophy of Religion: Some More Theses*

1. "Religion," in the generic sense, is the primary form of culture through which our existential question about the ultimate meaning of our lives is explicitly asked and answered.

2. Therefore, "the religious life," in the same generic sense, is the way of understanding oneself and leading one's life that is explicitly mediated by the images/symbols, concepts/terms of this, that, or the other specific religion. This means that the religious life, in the generic sense, is always an explicitly authorized life. And this it is because it belongs to religion generically, and thus to each religion specifically, to lay claim to decisive authority—to claim to be the authorized re-presentation of *the* answer to our existential question. Because, from its standpoint, the self-understanding/understanding of existence that it represents is uniquely realistic, being uniquely appropriate to, or authorized by, the very structure of ultimate reality itself, its re-presentations of this understanding have decisive authority for the understanding of human existence.

3. To live the religious life, then, as a life explicitly authorized by a specific religion, is to make or imply a distinctive double claim for what one thinks, says, and does in so living: not only (1) that it is, in turn, *appropriate* to whatever this religion takes to be the explicit primal source of its authority, but also (2) that it is *credible* to any woman or man as re-presenting the truth about her or his own existence as a human being.

4. This claim, however, is like all other claims to validity made or implied by life-praxis in that it is one thing to make or imply it, something else again to do so validly. Consequently, to live the religious life at all, particularly in the pluralized social-cultural circumstances in which more and more people live in a "globalizing-globalized" world, is to anticipate having somehow to make good on the claim, sooner or later, that one makes or implies in so living.

5. In this way, living the religious life requires that one become a theologian—and also a philosopher as well as a historian. This assumes, of course, the generic sense of "theology" in which, in correspondence with the generic sense of "religion" (§ 1), it means the specific form of critical reflection constituted by asking about the meaning and the validity of some specific way of living religiously. So a theologian, in this generic sense, asks more or less critically what it really means to live in this way and whether the distinctive double claim to appropriateness and credibility that anyone necessarily makes or implies by so living is really a valid claim.

6. To ask thus about either meaning or validity, however, is to ask questions that, in part, at least, are properly philosophical. This is so, at any rate, if one understands "philosophy" likewise in a generic sense, to mean the comprehensive critical reflection constituted by asking about human existence simply as such. It belongs to philosophy, so understood, that it should consist, in one aspect, in an analysis of *meaning*, and thus of the different *kinds* of meaning involved in understanding ourselves and leading our lives through all the forms of culture, religious as well as secular.

7. So, too, with the question about *validity*, including the validity of the double claim that living the religious life necessarily makes or implies. Although to ask whether a religious way of living is really appropriate to the source of authority authorizing it is to ask a question that is, in an essential part, properly historical and hermeneutical, even it is, in another essential part, a properly philosophical question. Insofar as one thereby asks about a certain *kind* of appropriateness, one asks a question that only philosophical reflection—whether done by philosophers or by theologians—is capable of answering. And the same is even more obviously true of the other question of whether a particular way of living religiously is really credible, in the sense that it really re-presents the truth about every woman or man's existence. This question can be answered affirmatively only if the necessary presuppositions and implications of this way of living, moral as well as metaphysical, can somehow be validated as credible. But, again, actually validating them requires properly philosophical reflection.

8. If living religiously in a specific way requires one to be a theologian; and if being a theologian requires that one also be a philosopher, as well as a historian, one has every reason to look for help from any others who, for reasons of their own, also have to be philosophers, including, especially, all who do philosophy professionally. Indeed, the more professionally philosophers carry out their own responsibility, the more likely they are to help anyone who is trying to live the religious life to do so responsibly.

9. There are two points where professional philosophers can be of particular help to any such religious person, especially today: (1) in connection with their one main task of analyzing the kind of meaning involved in asking and answering the existential question explicitly, and so religiously, they can provide a properly formal analysis of interreligious dialogue, including a purely formal language—conceptuality / terminology—in which materially different answers to the existential / religious question can all be critically interpreted and the real issues between them somehow resolved by appropriate evidence and argument; and (2) in connection with their other main task of critically validating all the different answers to the existential question, implicit as well as explicit, secular as well as religious, so as to formulate their own constructive answer to this question, they can help to make good on the claim that a particular way of living religiously is not only appropriate but also credible. If any such way of living is really credible, it can only be because what it re-presents as the truth about human existence is the same truth that the professional philosopher bears particular responsibility for critically validating by verifying its necessary presuppositions and implications, both metaphysical and moral.

10. There are still other respects in which professional philosophers can be helpful to anyone trying to lead a religious life in a responsible way: (1) they can decline to exempt anyone, including persons attempting to lead the religious life responsibly, from doing their own philosophical reflection; (2) they can recognise, as many philosophers in the past have not, that religion and philosophy, each in its way, are both formally normative for existential truth and that, therefore, the accountability between philosophers, on the one hand, and

religious persons and theologians, on the other, is entirely mutual; and, more important still, (3) they can be clear, as so many have not been, that philosophy and the religious life are not competitive but complementary, since, if the second requires the kind of critical reflection that only the first can provide, the first can at best only point to the second as a way of understanding oneself and leading one's life by which it itself, as philosophy, is utterly transcended.

(Cf. "Philosophy and the Religious Life: A Reflection on Charles Hartshorne's Contribution.")

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