

Any religion is constituted as such by some explicit primal source through which its particular self-understanding/ understanding of existence is decisively re-presented and authorized. At the same time, any religion lays claim to decisive existential authority because it also claims that its particular understanding of existence, being true, and its self-understanding being authentic, are of universal significance.

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It belongs to any religion that it should be a particular and, in that sense, arbitrary re-presentation of a universal possibility of understanding human existence. The particularity of the re-presentation is as essential to the religion as is the universality of the possibility—and vice versa.

In other words, to be human at all, in the proper sense of the words, is to have the *possibility* of such an understanding, whether or not anyone, much less everyone, actualizes it. Why must this be so? Because otherwise no religion could validly claim, as every religion does claim, to be the "true religion," in the sense of the formal norm for determining the truth about human existence that, according to all of the axial religions, every human being knows and must know in order to have always already ignored or suppressed it.

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Any religion has a founder or founders. Because any religion is a historical emergent, the subject(s) of the correlation wherewith it emerges in history as a religion is(are) properly said to be its founder(s). In the case of the preaxial religions, their founders are ususally no longer recognized by name but are anonymous, having long since receded into the mists of the prehistorical, mythical time to which the religions' traditions trace their origins. By contrast, the axial religions are what they are only because they acknowledge their founders explicitly by name as exactly that.

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Being religious is not only explicitly understanding oneself and leading one's life in a certain way, but also doing all this in *the* way either immediately authorized by the explicit primal source of some religion or mediately authorized by the same source through the religion that the source also authorizes and its particular means of ultimate transformation.

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The constitution of a religion has a threefold structure determined by two correlations. First, there is the correlation between *the religious object* and *the religious subject*; and, second, there is the correlation involved in the religious object itself between its *existential-transcendental aspect* and its *existential-historical aspect*.

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The object side of the religious correlation is duplex, having an existential-historical as well as an existential-transcendental aspect, the first being related to the second as the explicit is to the implicit. Otherwise put: in correlation with the subject side, the object side itself involves a correlation—in Clodovis Boff's terms—between an "order of *manifestation*" and an "order of *constitution*."

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The explicit primal source of a religion's authority is the *existential-historical* source explicitly authorizing its claim to decisive existential authority, as distinct from the *existential-transcendental* source authorizing its claim only implicitly.

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A religion has the explicit primal *ontic* source of its authority, and thus its origin and principle, in some particular occasion of insight, be it "hierophany" or "revelation." Correlative with this originating occasion of insight is a particular form of faith—"faith" in the sense of both self-understanding (*fides qua creditur*) and understanding of existence (*fides quæ creditur*)—which, as the explicit primal *noetic* source of the religion, in turn provides the foundation for a whole conceptual-symbolic structure of beliefs and actions, rites and social organizations. Whether and how this structure is further elaborated and how differentiated it becomes from other forms of culture are open to wide historical variations, as is the extent to which the claims to validity it expresses and implies may eventually be subjected to the higher level of critical reflection or appropriation that is commonly distinguished as "theology" in the generic-specific sense of this word. In any event, the only thing directly accessible to us when we speak of "religion" is some particular religion or religions, some particular way or ways of conceiving and symbolizing the meaning for us of the mysterious ultimate whole of reality encompassing our existence. Consequently, even the true religion, if there be such a thing, could not be identified with religion generically or simply as such. It could only be one or more specific religions distinguished from any others by the unique adequacy with which its or their specific concepts and symbols answered to the need that each religion exists to meet.

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The explicit primal ontic source of a theistic religion's authority may be said to be "on the same level with God, even if also distinct from God as the decisive representation of God's gift and demand." But, clearly, to be on the same level with God and to belong to the object, as distinct from the subject, side of the correlation constituting a theistic religion are simply two ways of saying the same thing.

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The most fundamental reason why religion is always to be distinguished from philosophy is clear. Whereas philosophy is already constituted in principle by

the original presentation of ultimate reality implicitly occurring in human experience simply as such, religion is constituted thanks only to some special re-presentation, some explicit re-presentation, of ultimate reality that claims to be its decisive re-presentation—decisive for human existence and thus also for deciding between all other special re-presentations, be they hierophanies or revelations.

21 November 2004; rev. 4 September 2006; 28 October 2009