

1. Religion is a "cultural system," more exactly, the primary cultural system through which human beings explicitly ask and answer the existential question of the meaning of ultimate reality for us.

2. But religion, like any other cultural system, primary or secondary, exists concretely only as a religion or religions—some specific cultural system or systems through which the existential question is explicitly asked and answered.

3. A specific religion is constituted as such by some explicit answer to the existential question, together with the particular concepts and symbols through which the question can alone be explicitly asked and answered in this way.

4. Thus while a specific religion always includes some explicit self-understanding, it also always includes the particular concepts and symbols but for which the self-understanding could not have become explicit.

5. Any specific religion makes or implies a claim to decisive existential authority for its particular concepts and symbols.

6. This it does because it also claims to be the formally true religion, i.e., the religion which itself is substantially true and with which any and all other religions have to agree in order also to be substantially true.

7. A religion is substantially true insofar as its explicit self-understanding, and thus its explicit answer to the existential question, is existentially true.

8. Whether its answer is existentially true can be determined only by a complex procedure of verification, involving properly historical and hermeneutical inquiry to determine just what its self-understanding is and implies as well as both properly metaphysical and properly moral inquiry to verify the necessary implications of its self-understanding for both belief and action.

8 June 1990