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The basic insight to be pursued in these reflections is that what is properly meant by "the true religion" is analogous to what is properly meant by "the true church" in a revisionary Protestant ecclesiology.

By "a revisionary Protestant ecclesiology," I mean essentially my own understanding of the church, which is defined by the following characteristics: (1) a three-part distinction between the invisible church, the visible church, and the institutional churches; (2) the contention that the visible church is constituted, not by word and sacraments, which, on the contrary, are constituted by it, but solely by the Christian witness of faith, in the broad sense in which Paul speaks of the "ministry / word of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:17 ff.); and (3) the rejection of the claim that membership in the visible church, and thus in some institutional church, is a necessary condition of membership in the invisible church (cf. *The Understanding of Christian Faith*: 93-119).

Given an ecclesiology defined by these characteristics, one may say that "the true church" is any institutional church in which the visible church is more rather than less visible—to apply the criterion so aptly suggested by the Westminster Confession's observation that the visible church "hath been sometimes more, sometimes less, visible." This, however, an institutional church can be only to the extent to which everything in it is appropriate to Jesus Christ, understood as the decisive revelation of God, or, in more general terms, the decisive re-presentation of the meaning of ultimate reality for us. Because or insofar as an institutional church is thus appropriate to this decisive revelation, or re-presentation, it is the true church.

But, then, in an analogous way, "the true religion" is to be understood as any religion in which the ground and object of authentic human faith are more rather than less appropriately represented. This, however, a religion can be only to the extent to which everything in it is appropriate to the original revelation of God, or, again, more generally, the original presentation of the meaning of ultimate reality for us. Because or insofar as a religion is thus appropriate to original revelation, or original presentation, it is the true religion.

Of course, it is the nature of any religion to *claim* to be the true religion, just as it is the nature of any institutional church to *claim* to be the true church. But the question always, in the one case as in the other, is whether this claim is valid and, if it is, how it is to be critically validated. Unlike the claim of an institutional church to be the true church, it cannot be validated by appeal to a formal norm through which the primal source of normativeness, and thus the decisive revelation of God, or the decisive re-presentation of the meaning of ultimate reality for us, is accessible in a fully explicit form. It can be validated, rather, only by appeal to the original revelation, or presentation, of ultimate reality, which is accessible in a fully explicit form only in some religion or philosophy, whose claim to be the true religion or the true philosophy—or, in Rudolf Bultmann's phrase, "the 'right' philosophy"—is itself always subject to exactly the same kind of critical validation.

Thus the only possible way of validating a religion as the true religion, or a philosophy as the right philosophy, is by showing that it contains within itself the representative power of its alternatives, plus additional such power of its own. Of course, "representative power" here means "power to represent relative to the thing that any religion or philosophy as such exists to represent and to its distinctive way of representing that thing." A religion exists to represent just how life is ultimately meaningful, as we unavoidably believe it to be insofar as we exist humanly at all, notwithstanding all the at least apparent threats to its meaningfulness that we cannot but experience as human beings. And its way of representing this thing is to speak both of ultimate reality and of our authentic relation to it at one and the same time—namely, by speaking of ultimate reality, not as metaphysics does, abstractly, in its structure in itself, but, as philosophy also does, concretely, in its meaning for us, and by speaking of our authentic relation to ultimate reality, not as morality does, abstractly, with respect to how we are to act and what we are to do categorially, but as philosophy also does, concretely, with respect to how we are to understand ourselves transcendently.

That religion is the true religion, then, even as that philosophy is the right philosophy, which can do exactly this relatively more adequately than any of its

alternatives. This also means, naturally, that that religion is the true religion, even as that philosophy is the right philosophy, whose metaphysical and moral implications can be validated respectively by properly metaphysical and moral inquiry.

This formulation—according to which that religion is the true religion, or that philosophy is the right philosophy, that contains the representative power of its rivals, plus additional such power of its own—is not the only way of making the essential point. It can also be made by saying that that religion is the true religion whose claims both confirm and are confirmed by those of the philosophy that is the right philosophy—and vice versa.

3 November 1989; rev. 3 September 2003; 20 April 2010