"Religious ideas claim to be the concrete form of ultimate truths; it follows that the more abstract ultimate truths should be derivable from them. . . . Otherwise, secular truth would be more final than religious."— Charles Hartshorne

Just as philosophy is the critical appropriation of our common faith simply as selves, so Christian theology is the attempt to critically appropriate specifically Christian faith. Whereas philosophy originates in "original revelation," in the sense of the primal disclosure of ultimate reality through our common faith as human beings, Christian theology has its origin in a "special revelation" that represents its relation to original revelation and to all other special revelations as that of an answer—more exactly, *the* answer, the *decisive* answer—to a question. What question? Well, the question that original revelation makes possible and that the plurality of special revelations, among other factors, makes necessary: the existential question, or the question of faith, and, under certain conditions, also the religious question.

But philosophy and Christian theology are not only closely analogous but, because of the peculiar relation between their respective objects—between our common faith as selves and specifically Christian faith—also overlap or, in a certain way, coincide. Because, however, Christian theology and philosophy by their very natures finally lay claim to the same basic ground, appeal to the same evidence—in short, seek the same ultimate truth—their material conclusions must be in the last analysis mutually confirming if either is to sustain its essential claim. This does not mean, of course, that their complete mutual confirmation must be actually realized, either now or at some time in the future. The essentially historical character of reflection, to say nothing of such other constants of the human equation as fragmentariness and sin, hardly permits this as a real possibility. We simply have to reckon with the indefinite continuation of our present more or less irreducible pluralism of philosophical and theological positions. But in doing so, we have no reason to set aside the ideal of mutual confirmation that philosophy and theology alike establish as governing their relationship—even if we have the best of reasons for suspecting all claims to have already realized the ideal. So long as philosophy is a serious undertaking it involves the confidence, which it attempts to justify, that the truth of its material conclusions can only be confirmed by any true conclusions of

Christian theology—and Christian theology, for its part, involves and seeks to justify a corresponding confidence about the confirmation of its conclusions by those of philosophy.

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There is no way of making a reasoned case for pluralism's claim that there are many true religions except by employing some norm of religious truth, either tacitly or openly. If not all religions are true, but at least some religion can be false, no specific religion can be judged to be true without reason, which is to say, without appropriate evidence, argumentative as well as experiential. Necessarily entailed by such evidence is some norm for judging true religion, whether it be the formal norm already given simply by some specific religion or theology or, alternatively, a norm derived from philosophy, in the sense of critical reflection on all religions as well as on all secular forms of culture. This means that pluralists must either employ such a norm and give a convincing account of their reasons for doing so or else content themselves with making no more than a purely formal statement about religions that falls short of their pluralistic claim.

To recognize this is to understand why pluralists who want to avoid relativism cannot finally escape what they often seem to regard as a difficulty peculiar to inclusivism—the difficulty, namely, of taking some one specific religion to be formally true, and hence the norm for determining all other religious truth. To be sure, they have the alternative of looking to philosophy to provide their norm, rather than to some specific religion or theology. But here, too, there are difficulties. For one thing, any sound philosophical analysis itself confirms that it belongs to the very nature of a religion to make or imply the claim to be formally true. It thus claims to be the formal norm not only for all other true religion, but also for any other existential truth whatever, including that of philosophy. Even if one allows, then, that a philosophy, also, makes or implies the claim to tell the truth about human existence, and hence to be formally normative for determining the truth of specific religions, one cannot ignore the claim of these religions to be formally true. One must allow, in fact, that the truth in any philosophy not only has to confirm that in any religion, but also has to be confirmed by it. So, pending the

inquiry necessary to validate both of their claims to truth, one cannot look simply to some philosophy to provide one's norm, but must assume, rather, that any specific religion is as much the source of normative judgment as its object, while any particular philosophy is as much the object of such judgment as its source.

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It is wholly arbitrary to assume that all other religious and secular perspectives, including the Christian, must submit to be judged by some particular understanding of human existence. If the constitutive claim of Christian witness is valid, the truth it asserts cannot fail both to confirm and to be confirmed by any other religious or secular truth of the same logical type, including that of the particular understanding in question. Therefore, even if one holds, as I do, that Christian claims can be validated as credible only on the basis of our common experience simply as human beings, one has no reason to suppose that this requires submitting these claims to the judgment of some other religious or secular perspective, whose own claims to validity are merely that, unless and until they, too, are critically validated. On the contrary, pending the inquiry required to validate *all* claims to credibility, one has every reason to assume that traditional Christian views may be as much the source of critical judgment as they are its object; while any other perspective, such as the particular understanding in question, may be as much in need of criticism as it is the basis for critical judgment.

(After *On Theology* 85, 88; *Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many?* 70 ff.; and *Doing Theology Today:* 158)