"[T]he priority of experience to reason is irreversible. . . . Furthermore, . . . experience or perception itself involves an unsuppressable element of faith—of instinctive confidence in the independent reality of that which our experience in its various modes discloses. Our most inescapable certainties about existence, whether our own or that of the encompassing whole of which we perceive ourselves and our fellow creatures to be parts, are not facts that reason as such either needs to or could provide. Rather, they are in the strictest sense matters of faith, apart from which none of our special inquiries, whether scientific, moral, or religious, would even be possible or have any point. . . .

"[T]he Augustinian formula 'faith seeking understanding' describes the task of secular philosophy no less accurately than that of Christian theology. To be sure, the faith the philosopher is charged with understanding is not specifically *Christian* faith. Moreover, the experience he takes as his datum has several clearly distinguishable moments or fields, of which only the various forms of philosophical reflection all working together can hope to provide the analysis.Even so, in trying to analyze the most fundamental structures of this experience as attested by language and culture the philosopher, too, is without doubt seeking to understand faith—that 'common faith' which is constitutive of our experience as such and by which we all live simply as human beings. But this means, among other things, that the ultimate tests of truth are something other than the principles of a supposedly 'pure' reason. They are themselves matters of faith, and so are grounded in that original revelation of God to mankind of which the Christian faith claims to be the decisive re-presentation" ("Faith and Truth" [1965]: 1057 f.).

"[H]uman experience is [not] exhausted by the external sense perception of which science and history in their different ways are the critical analysis and reflection. Man . . . also enjoys an internal nonsensuous awareness of his own existence and of the existence of his fellow creatures as finite-free parts of an infinite and encompassing whole. Indeed, this second kind of experience proves to be fundamental to the other kind, to our external sense perception. Presupposed by all my sense experience and the judgments arising from it is . . . the certainty of existence, i.e., the certainty that I exist as the subject of my experience and that I exist together with others, fellow creatures like myself, with whom I am related and on whose actions I am dependent, even as they are thus related and dependent with respect to me. And no less constitutive of this certainty of existence is the certainty that both I and my fellow creatures exist within, and therefore as parts of, an all-inclusive whole—that circumambient reality which is the primal source whence we come and the ultimate end whither we go. . . . [I]t is this complex experience of existence—of myself, others, and the whole—which is the experience out of which all religious language arises and to which it properly refers. In this sense, all religious language—including, therefore, the word 'God'—is *existential* language, the language in which we express and refer to our own existence as selves related to others and the whole. . . .

"[T]his foundational certainty of existence. . . has a richness or thickness that the word 'existence' may not adequately convey. My experience of myself, others, and the whole is not simply the experience *that* we are in some neutral or non-evaluative sense—as mere facts, so to speak—but is always, precisely as the experience of existence, an experience of worth, of value, of meaning, of significance. In experiencing my own existence in relation to others and the whole, the essence of my experience is *the sense of worth*—of my own worth for myself and others, of their worth for themselves and me, and of our common worth for the whole and its worth for all of us.

"In short, the foundational certainty underlying all of my experience is not only that I am together with others in the whole, but that what I am and what they are is significant, makes a difference, is worthwhile. This certainty that I am and that what I am is significant or worthwhile is . . . basic confidence in the worth of life. [This confidence is] the primal faith which is constitutive of our very lives as human beings and which, therefore, is in the

proper sense the 'common faith' of mankind. To exist as a man at all is to exist as one who shares in this common faith, because every attempt to deny it or to controvert it actually presupposes it. I cannot question the worth of life without presupposing the worth of questioning and therefore the worth of the life by which alone such questioning can be done. Likewise, to look for evidence against the claim that life is worthwhile assumes not only that there is or can be such evidence, but that it is worthwhile spending one's time and energy to try to find it. As a matter of fact, even suicide, or the intentional act of taking one's own life, does not entail so much a denial of life's worth as an affirmation of it. I can hardly choose to end my life unless I assume that doing so is not merely pointless, but somehow is significant or makes a difference" ("How Does God Function in Human Life?" [1967]: 34 f.).

"[T]he most primitive mode of our experience is an awareness at once of being and of value; it is our dim sense of reality as such, as something that matters or has worth or is of intrinsic importance. . . . [T]his sense of reality which underlies all our experience comprises infinitely more than is sometimes supposed. It is the awareness not merely of ourselves and of our fellow creatures, but also of the infinite whole in which we are all included as somehow one. The very nature of our experience . . . is such as to compel recognition of this third essential factor. Just as we are never aware of our own existence except as related to the being of others, so our sense that both we and they are important is our sense of the encompassing whole without which such importance could never be. . . . Because at the base of whatever we say or do there is our primitive awareness of ourselves and the world as both real and important, all our experience is in its essence religious. It rests in the sense of our own existence and of being generally as embraced everlastingly in the encompassing reality of God" ("Present Prospects for Empirical Theology" [1969]: 85 f.).

"[W]e may define 'myth' . . . by means of three closely related statements:

"1. Myth is a particular way of thinking and speaking that, like other such ways, represents (i.e., *re*-presents, presents *again*) the reality presented in one basic mode of human experience.

"2. The reality that myth represents is the ultimate reality presented in our original, internal, non-sensuous experience of ourselves, others, and the whole.

"3. The particular way in which myth thinks and speaks of this ultimate reality is as a narative or story determined, on the one hand, by its intention to answer the existential question of the meaning of this reality for us and, on the other hand, by its use of concepts and terms proper to the other basic mode of human experience, namely, our derived, external, sense experience of others and ourselves. . . .

"Thus myth is [defined] as committing by its very structure the kind of 'category mistake' that Gilbert Ryle takes to be committed whenever there is 'the presentation of facts belonging to one category in the idioms appropriate to another.'. . . On the other hand, by representing this mistake as precisely as it does, the definition avoids the familiar difficulties of defining 'myth' too loosely as thinking and speaking about the divine in concepts and terms that properly apply to the non-divine. What makes myth myth is not simply that it thinks and speaks about the ultimate whole of reality non-literally in concepts and terms that literally aply to ourselves and others, but that it presents facts belonging to the category of our existence as such in the idioms appropriate to the very different category of the reality presented by our senses" ("Myth" [1983]: 390).

"[T]o be a self is not merely to be continually becoming, but also to exist, in the emphatic sense in which 'existence' means that one is consciously aware of one's becoming and, within the limits of one's situation, responsible for it. Thus one is aware, above all, of one's real, internal relatedness—not only to one's own ever-changing past and future, but also to a many-leveled community of others similarly caught up in time and change and, together with them, to the all-inclusive whole of reality itself. But one is also aware, relative to this same whole of reality, of one's own essential fragmentariness and of the equally essential fragmentariness of all others. With respect to both time and space, the whole alone is essentially integral and nonfragmentary, having neither beginning nor end and lacking an external environment. This is not to say, however, that the whole of reality is experienced as mere unchanging being, in every respect infinite and absolute. On the contrary, insofar as the whole is neither merely abstract nor a sheer aggregate, it must

be like the self and anything else comparably concrete and singular in being an instance of becoming, or an ordered sequence of such instances, which as such is always finite in contrast to the infinite realm of possibility and relative and not absolute in its real, internal relations to others. . . .

"[T]o be human [,then,] is to live as a fragment, albeit a self-conscious and, therefore, responsible fragment, of the integral whole of reality as such. In other words, . . . the meaning of ultimate reality for us demands that we accept both our own becoming and the becoming of all others as parts of this ultimate whole and then, by serving as best we can the transient goods of all the parts, to make the greatest possible contribution to the enduring good of the whole" ("Process Theology and the Wesleyan Witness" [1984]: 20 f.).

"1. To be a human being is not only to exist as all creatures do but also to understand that one exists and, therewith, to understand the meaning of reality as such and thus, in principle, whatever can be understood: the world of others in real, internal relation with which one alone exists, and the encompassing whole of reality that is the primal source and the final end both of oneself and of the world.

"2. But this complex reality of self, others, and the whole, which is presented to our existence in and through the implicit understanding that makes us human, can also be re-presented (i.e., presented *again,* or a *second* time) through the explicit understanding of our existence. The media of such explicit understanding are the concepts and symbols, ability to use which is the external, or behavioral, evidence of our endowment with the distinctively human capacity of understanding. Accordingly, what [is meant] in general by 're-presentation' is simply the explicit conceptualization and symbolization of the complex reality that we do and must understand at least implicitly as soon and as long as we are human at all.

"3. Fundamental to all that we can thus conceptualize and symbolize is the reality of our own existence simply as such, as an existence together with others within the mysterious whole whence we all come and whither we all go. In other words, our endowment with understanding enables us to re-present our own existence with others in the world under the gift and demand of God—'God' being one of the principal ways by which human beings have conceptualized and symbolized the primal source and final end of their own existence as well as of everything else. It is just this 'capacity for

God,' indeed, that underlies the particular cultural form of religion, whether the theistic type of religion for which 'God' is the constitutive concept and symbol, or any of the other nontheistic types of religion as well" (*Faith and Freedom*, 2d ed. [1989]: 93 f.).

"To be human is not only to exist together with others, both human and nonhuman, but also to understand oneself and others and reality generally and, within limits, to be responsible for them. At the root of this responsibility is the distinctive freedom that is ours in consequence of our capacity for understanding both ourselves and others and the encompassing whole of reality of which we are all parts. Unlike other animals whose overall course of life is largely determined by species-specific instincts, we are 'instinct poor.' Not only the details of our lives but even their overall pattern as authentically human remain undecided by our membership in the human species and are left to our own freedom and responsibility to decide. To be sure, the freedom of any one of us as an individual is in a way preempted by the decisions already made by those who have gone before us in the particular society and culture into which we are born or in which it is given to us to become human. But while none of us can be socialized and acculturated without internalizing some already decided understanding of human existence, the very process of internalization serves to develop our capacity for understanding and, therefore, for questioning the validity of our cultural inheritance. In other words, we acquire the ability to ask the existential question of how we are to understand ourselves and others in relation to the whole if ours is to be an authentic human existence" (*Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many?* [1992]: 6).

"To be human . . . is not only to live, but to live understandingly—to understand one's life in its proximate and ultimate settings and, within limits, to be free to lead it and responsible for doing so. But our capacity thus to live understandingly is typically exercised not merely on one level, but on two. It is exercised on the primary level of self-understanding and life-praxis, where it consists in asking and answering a number of vital questions, but for somehow asking and answering [which] we could not lead our lives at all. We can never answer these vital questions, however, without making or implying certain claims to validity in doing so. Thus, for example, if we

somehow answer our vital question about the truth of our life and its settings, we unavoidably make or imply a claim to truth.

"Much of the time, no doubt, our truth claims, as well as our other validity claims, are not particularly problematic, and we may discharge the obligation we assume in making or implying them while still remaining on the primary level of self-understanding and life-praxis. But any time we cannot validate our claims on this primary level, we have no alternative, if we are not to break off communication altogether, but to move to the secondary level of critical reflection. There living understandingly consists, not in asking and answering our vital questions, as we do on the primary level, but, rather, in critically reflecting on the answers we there give to them: first of all, by critically *interpreting* our answers and then, secondly, by critically *validating* the claims to validity that we make or imply in giving them. In other words, our questions on this secondary level are not the *vital* questions we ask and answer on the primary level, but, rather, certain *theoretical* questions cognate with our vital questions, which ask about the meaning of our answers to the questions and about the validity of the claims that we make or imply in so answering them" ("Religious Studies and Theological Studies" [1995]: 3 f.

"To be human is not only to live, but also to understand one's life and, within limits, to be free to lead it and responsible for doing so. Of course, in understanding one's life, one understands indefinitely more than oneself—not only all the others, human and nonhuman, without which one could not live at all, but also the encompassing whole of reality of which both oneself and all others are parts. But thus to live understandingly, and so also freely and responsibly, is precisely to lead one's life according to certain norms or principles of validity, whether authenticity and sincerity, or truth, goodness, and beauty. This means that one's very life as a human being involves asking certain questions—whether the existential question about the authenthic understanding of oneself and others in relation to the whole, or other hardly less vital questions about the true, the good, and the beautiful. It also means, however, that the whole of one's life-praxis, and so whatever one thinks, says, or does, in effect answers these same questions, thereby making or implying certain corresponding claims to validity. . . .

"Thus, to say or imply that so-and-so is the case is to answer the question about the true and at least to imply a claim to truth in doing so. But if thus implying or making a truth claim is a typical exercise of our essentially human capacity to live understandingly, it is by no means the only such exercise. Not only do we just as typically make or imply all sorts of other claims—to authenticity and rightness as well as to goodness and beauty—but we also ask, at least under certain circumstances, about the validity of our several claims. We ask, for example, whether what is *said* to be the case is *really* the case, and, in this sense, whether the claim to truth expressed or implied by the saying is a valid claim. This example suffices to show that our capacity to live understandingly is typically exercised not merely on one level, but on two. On the primary level of self-understanding and life-praxis, it is exercised by asking and answering the question of truth and all of our other vital questions and by making or implying claims to validity in answering them. On the secondary level of critical reflection and proper theory, it is exercised by critically interpreting our answers in relation to our questions and by critically validating the claims to validity that the answers make or imply" (*Doing Theology Today* [1996]: 22 f.).

"[T]he existential question [is] the question we all ask as human beings about the meaning of our own existence in its ultimate setting. As such, it has two distinct but inseparable aspects: a metaphysical aspect, in which it asks about the reality of our existence as part of the encompassing whole; and a moral aspect, in which it asks about how we are to understand ourselves realistically in accordance with this reality, and, in this sense, authentically. Therefore, while the existential question is neither the properly metaphysical question nor the properly moral question, it is nevertheless logically related to both questions, and any answer to it implies certain answers to them, even as, conversely, any answer to either of them also implies some answer to it. This means, among other things, that any existentialist interpretation of . . . writings, oriented, as it must be, by the existential question, not only must allow for, but even requires, both properly metaphysical and properly moral ways of interpreting them" (*Doing Theology Today* [1996]: 49).

"To be human . . . is not merely to live but to live understandingly, and that not merely on one level but on two. On the primary level [of] 'self-

understanding and life praxis,' we live only by somehow understanding ourselves in the proximate and ultimate settings of our lives and by believing and acting, and so leading our lives, accordingly. Thus our questions on this level are all the vital questions of life itself—of how to live and to live well, and how to live better; and in answering them as we do, we perforce make or imply certain claims for the validity of our answers. Ordinarily, we can make good on the promises to others implied by such claims simply by appealing, on the same primary level, to what we and they, as members of our particular socio-cultural group, agree in accepting as valid, in the sense of true, good, beautiful, and so on. But whenever appeals on this first level are, for whatever reasons, insufficient to redeem our promises, we have no alternative, if we are to validate our claims so as to remain in communication with others, but to shift to the secondary level [of] 'critical reflection.' There the questions we have to pursue are no longer the *vital* questions we ask and answer on the primary level of self-understanding and life-praxis, although such questions do and must continue to orient our inquiries, but rather the corresponding *theoretical* questions about the meaning of our answers and about the validity of the claims that we make or imply in answering them as we do. . . .

"If we ask . . . what the vital question orienting theology is, the only adequate answer . . . is that it is that most vital of our vital questions that [may be distinguished], following Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, and others, as 'the existential question.' By this [is meant] the question that we human beings seem universally engaged in somehow asking and answering, about the meaning of our own existence in its ultimate setting as part of the encompassing whole" ("Paul in Contemporary Theology and Ethics" [1996]: 5 f.).