



# BULLETIN

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## NEW PUBLICATIONS

Yunt, Jeremy. *The Ecotheology of Paul Tillich: Spiritual Roots of Environmental Ethics*. This book can be purchased directly from the author for \$10, plus \$2 shipping, or on Amazon.com. (Dr. Andrew Linzey, Oxford University, author of *Animal Theology*, gave it very glowing reviews.)

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Rittenhouse, Bruce P. *Shopping for Meaningful Lives: A Christian Existential Reinterpretation of the Moral Motivation of Consumerism through the Theology of Paul Tillich*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2010.

*Please send information on new publications on Tillich or by Tillich scholars to the editor. Thank you.*

<b>LETTERS TO THE EDITOR</b>
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To the Editor:

I missed our Society's 2010 meetings, having at that time pressing business at the Mayo Clinic. I therefore did not hear Durwood's banquet address, but my heart did fill with joy when I read it in the Bulletin.

I have long argued that Tillich has at least two different Christologies, and two different notions of religious "symbols." In the stronger sense of "symbol," most clearly worked out in *Dynamics of Faith*, but also present in ST I and in the first half of ST II, Tillich treats a symbol as a carrier of revelation, that is, of knowledge of God as being itself. This epistemic claim requires a warrant, a justification, and this he provides in the ontological claim that all objects that are potential symbols participate in being-itself. In the weaker sense, "symbol" is used widely with no warrant and seems to mean little more than "do not take this assertion literally unless I tell you to." It is the predominant sense of "symbol" in the second half of ST II and ST III. Similarly, in the first half of ST II, Tillich treats the biblical picture of Jesus as the Christ as a symbol, in the first sense of the term. It is an especially powerful symbol, but not essentially different from the central symbols of other religions. Here we have Tillich the pluralist, at least potentially. In the second half of ST II, we have the Christ as a unique event, "the center of history," of everybody's history, not just of Christians. Farewell pluralism. Tillich's claims may well be in accord with the Christian tradition, and therefore good theology, but he provides no warrants for these claims, and so is doing very poor philosophy. For making these claims, I have been treated as a nice enough fellow, but perhaps a bit of a heretic, not quite a pure Tillichian. Hence the swell in my heart when I read Durwood Foster, an unquestionably reliable Tillich scholar, saying that in Tillich we have the openness of cultural theology sharing the same brain with a quite traditional church theology. Durwood's case is more general, mine more particular; but here the general does support the particular. Thank you, Durwood!

Don Dreisbach  
Granada, Spain  
4 May 2011



Dear Fred,

Durwood Foster and I appear to have made a breakthrough. In a series of four letters to the editor in this place, we have carried on a debate over the following question: In 1957, did Tillich change his 1951 position regarding the basic unsymbolic statement that theology must make about God?

Foster has argued that, in the introduction to the second volume of his system (1957), Tillich *abandoned* the position he laid down in volume one of 1951. That earlier position was that theology's basic unsymbolic statement is: "God is being-itself" (ST I:238-39). Foster believes Tillich replaced that statement, in effect, with this 1957 formulation: "everything we say about God is symbolic" (ST II: 9).

Sharply to the contrary, I argue that Tillich *maintained* his 1951 position, and that the 1957 formulation was a bit of a slip on Tillich's part. As I explained in the Fall 2010 issue of this *Bulletin*, the 1957 formulation appears to involve a paradox of self-reference. And further, if the 1957 formulation is now to replace such statements as "God is being-itself," Tillich has landed himself right back in the pan-symbolist position that he thanked W. M. Urban for helping him get out of. (Following Urban's suggestion, Tillich got himself out of that plight by judging "God is being-itself" to be unsymbolic, and making it the first or basic of his theological statements about God.)

Happily, in private communication, I believe Foster has warmed to the point I have just made about pan-symbolism. More importantly, in e-mail and telephone exchanges beginning in February 2011, the two of us seem to have made the "breakthrough" to which I refer at the outset above. Mutually and simultaneously, we seem to have discovered something hitherto unnoticed, something that I believe has the potential to drive away the dark cloud under which Tillich's theology has labored on this issue for fifty-four years (cf. John Clayton, *Tillich Main Works* IV: 20).

It is not my purpose to lay out our discovery here. There is not room, and I do not want to "betray the secret," anyway. When we can find the time, Foster and I hope to address the issues involved in article-length discussions, side by side. But since that may be a while coming, there are at least two points in the existing record of our debate that (to me, at least) cry out to be clarified or corrected—sooner rather than later.

(1) In the Fall 2010 *Bulletin* I presented four grounds for my view that Foster was mistaken. In the next issue he replied, “Prof. James’s third enumerated point is one I simply do not get. The citation from the Kegley-Bretall volume (1952) says the one un-symbolic statement is that God is being itself. This merely reiterates the position [of 1951 that] Tillich changed from in 1957.”

But Tillich did not merely reiterate. Foster may have missed something. Here is the quotation from Tillich that I gave, with the key part emphasized: “The un-symbolic statement *which implies the necessity of religious symbolism* is that God is being-itself, and as such beyond the subject-object structure” (in Kegley-Bretall, 334, emphasis added).

Clearly no change in position is involved in 1957, if Tillich’s statement of his position in that year (viz., “Everything we say about God is symbolic”) is already *implied* by what Tillich said on this subject in 1951. And Tillich manifestly thinks that to be the case. When one reads the content of the just-quoted explanation from Tillich, it is clear that the “implication” he is talking about is an *entailment*: Tillich’s 1957 statement is entailed by and deducible from his 1951 statement that God is being-itself. Ergo, there is no change of position in 1957 from what Tillich had laid down in 1951.

(2) Elsewhere in his Winter 2011 letter Foster pleads that we all reread the short section in ST II where Tillich says the one unsymbolic statement is “everything we say about God is symbolic.” He continues, “there is a further clincher some thirteen lines further on (ST II, p. 10) which Prof. James entirely ignores, viz., Tillich’s statement that ‘If we say God is the infinite, or the unconditional, or being-itself, we speak rationally and ecstatically at the same time’. He [Tillich] further elucidates that these

predications ‘precisely designate the boundary line at which both the symbolic and the non-symbolic coincide’. How could anyone assert more definitely that they will not serve as the one un-symbolic statement?”

I don’t think that follows at all—especially given what Tillich says in the rest of this passage. Reading the next five lines beyond where Foster leaves off, we learn that the “boundary” where symbolic and unsymbolic coincide—the passage speaks of it as a “point” as well as a “boundary”—is not an exclusive or disjunctive line or point. Rather, it is a line or point at which the symbolic and unsymbolic are *both present*. The verb “coincide” already suggests this; and Tillich is clear and explicit on the matter: “The point itself is both non-symbolic and symbolic” (ST II:10).

What this means is that any of the three assertions he lists—God is the infinite, the unconditional, or being-itself—may be uttered symbolically *or* non-symbolically, depending upon situation, intent, mindset, and cognitive capacity of the speaker. And if that is the case—if “God is being-itself” may be uttered unsymbolically—nothing prohibits Tillich from choosing that statement, and *continuing* to choose it, as the first, basic, and *unsymbolic* statement that his theology must make about God.

Tillich has showered us in this passage with a number of *additional* insights, most of them clarifying, one or two of them confusing. But he has not *subtracted* anything of moment. I believe he has been careful to *continue to allow* for the key, *unsymbolic* statement on which he has based his theology, from volume one forward.

Rob James  
7 May 2011

**BOOK REVIEW: TILlich ON WAR  
AND PEACE**

RON STONE

*Religious Internationalism: War and Peace in the Thought of Paul Tillich* by Matthew Lon Weaver. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2010, 345 pp., 35.00.

Neither political realism nor liberal international theories of international politics adequately explain America’s foreign policy that lurches from

national interest pursuit to universal hopes. At the close of his life in 1965, Tillich assumed as self-evident the need for a realistic perspective, and he criticized the utopianism of the pope and others. However, his realism was neither a nationalistic nor a self-serving realism. It was realism cognizant of the need to reach toward human unity, but filled with the knowledge that the dream exceeded humanity’s grasp. Finally, after teaching many summers in Europe and in winters in Chicago, he sought to reduce the conflicts between the world’s great religions. In his travel to Asia he engaged in dialogue

with Buddhism and Buber. His thought was international to a degree few following him have achieved.

Weaver's first chapter is a rich contribution to those who read Tillich only in English. He analyzes the World War I battlefield sermons of Tillich as the Kaiser's chaplain. The war would nearly destroy Tillich's mind, and he suffered post-traumatic stress syndrome through the rest of his life. Despite some doubts raised in private correspondence, and his attempt to leave the slaughter, his sermons provided religious cover for the horror of the war. Weaver translates the sermons beautifully. He summarizes their meanings under the categories of Christian piety; soldierly qualities; the Fatherland and sacrifice; war, peace, and reconciliation; power and weakness. Tillich wove German mystical spiritualism with idealistic philosophy into a nationalistic war theology. His nervous breakdowns, private correspondence, and personal reports of superiors criticizing his less-than-usual rallying of the troops to battle, and the surrender of "war theology" in 1918 hint that something other than German nationalistic theology was working in him. Only Tillich's penchant for saving manuscripts has allowed his admirers this glimpse into his early imperial nationalism. He would later refer often to his studies in Schelling and refer to his socialism without recalling the contents of these sermons. This chapter, despite needing more Schelling, is worth the price of the book.

Chapter Two, "The Religious-Socialist Theologian of Culture," is a story that has been well told before, and Weaver makes use of the secondary writings of this period to present his own fine interpretation. Despite the internationalism of socialism, Tillich's two books, *The Religious Situation* and *The Socialist Decision* confine their analyses to Germany. In two references in *The Socialist Decision*, Tillich discusses the socialist conflict of having an ideal of international humanity and the need to realize itself nationally. Even here the religious internationalism is struggling to emerge.

The Tillich of interwar migration shows Tillich overcoming his self-confessed German provincialism in his new empire. This third chapter presents a pivotal work, "Religion and World Politics," in the center of the book. Weaver's work is the first major English interpretation of this fragment in his German handwriting. The concept of *world* is implied in the religious creation myths and in the symbol of the Kingdom of God. It has been approximated through imperialism and international organization. Nationalist thinking, proven inadequate, needed to be re-

placed by world or international thinking. Religious sensitivity could encourage the development of world thinking. In the fragment, part of an intended book, Tillich generated in embryo the religious internationalism that is the theme Weaver chose to integrate Tillich's thought on war and peace. Tillich was fleeing German nationalism, but not to become an American nationalist. He became a religious internationalist in America.

Weaver presents in Chapter Four his longest and best discussion of Tillich's wartime German talks for the Voice of America. The chapter is a high point of the book. The hope of a defeated-reformed Germany rejoining the world community as contributor and not dictator again expresses Tillich's religious international consciousness.

The fifth chapter moves to analyze Tillich's wartime participation in America. His international spirit is seen in his hopes for a European federation and for a united, democratic Germany among other nations. These hopes were premature and were realized only decades later. Some of the roughest edges of national sovereignty have been reduced in the same period with the expansion of international organizations and policies.

The twists and turns in analysis of cold-war issues occupy Weaver's Chapter Six. The world's halting steps toward community were thwarted by the competition between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. Tillich recognized the community of fear of nuclear apocalypse and he saw a few signs of eros striving toward community. When he spoke of a vacuum it was neither as a German nor an American but as an international thinker observing the world threatened by two nationalisms. The book tells the cold-war story well, and it is wise to grasp Weaver's organization of Tillich's life from World War into the dangerous cold-war years. Tillich is fundamentally a wartime thinker.

The final chapter discusses both the positive contribution of religious internationalism and provides a critique at points. Weaver finds *Kairos* to bear different meanings in scripture and only a few of them could support Tillich's meaning. He finds Tillich's use of the term to describe both the Weimar period and World War II unhelpful. His dismissal of the Cold War period as a vacuum seems unhelpful to Weaver. In short, religious internationalism does not need the awkward concept of *Kairos*. He criticizes Tillich for failing to look at socialist developments beyond Germany. Some of Tillich's stereotyping of Jews and Germans seems particularly awkward. Til-

lich's world consciousness still needed development. As Jose Miguez Bonino reminded the Tillich Society in 2000, there is no evidence of Tillich traveling below the equator or of having much interest in studying the South.

Finally Weaver interprets Tillich's late life exploration of dialogue between Eastern and Western religions as an essential part of his religious internationalism. It is a fruitful beginning and contribution to the thought about international politics to recognize the role of religion contributing to both international conflict and to its possible healing. Contempo-

rary realist theory of international relations requires both his international community and his recognition of the relevance of religion. Tillich knew nations pursued their own interests even as he regarded them from a religious internationalist perspective.

The story of Tillich's development from pious nationalism to a critical scholar of religious internationalism is a useful journey for all students of the period or admirers of Tillich to take. Chapters 1, 3, and 4 need to be read by even the seasoned scholars of the North American Paul Tillich Society.

**ANALYTICAL REPORT ON PAPERS  
DELIVERED IN TWO TILlich MEETINGS  
MONTRÉAL, CANADA,  
NOVEMBER 6 - 9, 2009<sup>1</sup>**

BY ROB JAMES, EDITOR,  
CHARLES FOX, RONALD MACLENNAN,  
MARCIA MACLENNAN, LOYE ASHTON<sup>2</sup>

From Friday, November 6 through Monday, November 9, 2009, the Annual Meetings of the two premier Tillich organizations in America took place in Montréal, Canada. The North American Paul Tillich Society held three scholarly sessions on Friday in the Palais des Congrès. That evening the Society's Annual Banquet took place at Holiday Inn Select, Montréal Centre Ville. The next morning there was one further session in the Fairmont Queen Elizabeth Hotel. During these five sessions, the Society heard fifteen papers, counting the banquet address and three contributions to a panel. From 30 to 50 people were present for each paper.

The Tillich Group of the American Academy of Religion held two sessions on Monday, both in the Palais des Congrès. At these sessions a total of eight papers were heard by 35 and 50 people, respectively.

For ease of reference, the papers are numbered 1-23. All but five of these 23 papers are published in volume 36 (2010) of *The Bulletin of the North American Paul Tillich Society*. Three of these five are appearing in volume 37.<sup>3</sup>

**First Session of the Tillich Society: Friday, 9:00-11:30 a.m. *Tillich's Lineage: Connections to Notes in Western Intellectual History***

1. Courtney Wilder, Midland Lutheran College. "Tillich, Augustine, and Pauline Hermeneutics." *Reviewed by Ron MacLennan.*

That Tillich is Augustinian and Pauline is a truism of Tillich scholarship. Wilder undertakes to show specifically how this is so by pointing to roots in Augustine of Tillich's method of correlation, his understanding of sign/symbol, and his theological anthropology. She attends primarily to Augustine's *On Christian Teaching*; Tillich's 3-sermon set, "The Theologian"; plus 1 Corinthians and Deuteronomy. Her overarching theme is Augustine's hermeneutical method as a precursor of Tillich's method of correlation. Augustine insisted that a solid intellectual foundation is necessary for the proper interpretation of scripture and hence for an understanding of Christian faith. For Tillich, human existence is inherently question-shaped, and the elucidation of such questioning demands Augustinian intellectual rigor, involving extensive use of non-biblical disciplines and knowledge. Essential to this rigor is a proper understanding of biblical language itself. Although Tillich does not adopt, for example, Augustine's four-fold interpretation of biblical language, he insists that the notion of sign (Augustine) or symbol (Tillich) is essential to convey the gospel. Finally, for both Augustine and Tillich, the appropriate biblical hermeneutic is about us humans in relation to God: "It is we who are interpreted by scripture."

Wilder's study might profitably be enriched by considering the Synoptic and Johannine elements in Tillich's biblical hermeneutics: for example, the tension between Logos and Spirit Christologies in Tillich's theology.

2. Gretchen Freese, St. Andrew's Lutheran Church (Glenwood, IL). "Tillich's Ethical Nature as Drawn from Nietzsche and Luther." *Reviewed by Ron MacLennan.*

Relying centrally on Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* and *The Genealogy of Morals*, as well as Tillich's *Morality and Beyond*, Freese explores how

Tillich's understanding of ethics overcomes Nietzsche's criticism of Christian ethics as a slave morality. Nietzsche holds that morality is a construct developed and promulgated by the upper class nobility to legitimate their privilege and to keep the lower classes in their place. With the insight that moral systems are shaped by the interests of those claiming them, Tillich agrees. However, four concepts are crucial to Freese's case, and, with respect to them, Tillich successfully reconstructs what Nietzsche deconstructs: moralism, moralisms, love, and *kairos*. Moralism is the attitude that provides a structured moral system; moralisms are the inevitably oppressive plural results of moralism. Love, ontologically understood, transcends the defined good and evil of morality and moralisms. Love recaptures the grace that is lost to Nietzsche. Grace breaks through in moments of *kairos*; morality takes its proper place when the transcendent breaks into the temporal and gives opportunity for creative response. Such morality is theonomous, not heteronomous (nor autonomous); it is not enslaving, but liberating.

Freese opens a topic worth broadening and deepening. The connection to Lutheran tradition, and to Protestant principle and Catholic substance, could be further developed. Tillich's ethics also bear elucidation in dialectical relationship to other critiques of religion from Feuerbach through Marx and Freud to the new atheists.

3. Brandon Love, Trinity International University. "Tillich on Eros, Logos and the Beauty of Kant." *Reviewed by Loye Ashton.*

Love's intention with this paper is to continue the argument first set forth by Chris Firestone at the 2008 AAR meeting with his paper, "Tillich's Indebtedness to Kant: Two Recently Translated Review Essays on Rudolf Otto's *Idea of the Holy*." Love seeks to demonstrate that Kant's theoretical work on aesthetics undergirds and unites Tillich's theological understanding of *logos* and *eros*. Love explains that Kant's third critique (his "third question")—the question of hope—in the *Critique of Judgment* arises out of the tension between the first and the second questions ("What can I know?" and "What ought I to do?") This tension exists because there is an existential gap between knowing and doing the good. For Kant, beauty is the bridge that unites the world of nature as given (facts) and the world of culture as chosen (values). Yet this bridge ends up being one-way, unable to be communicated effectively in words. Love, citing the work of Ste-

phen Palmquist, shows the inadequacy of this synthesis and that even Kant realized it, a realization that resulted in his turn toward religion in search of a resolution. Love's claim is that Tillich's concept of our participation in being (through the Logos and eros) as meaning (the unity of the ontological with the existential) is based on Kant's unity of beauty as the inner purpose, without external authority, that unites fact and value.

Tillich understands the problem that Kant could not resolve as estrangement brought about by the reality of Logos as universal and ontological reason: "reason leaves us longing for what we are aware of because of reason itself." For Tillich, according to Love, the deepest meaning of religion—the answer to this estrangement—is the reunion brought about by Eros. The unity of Logos and Eros is achieved only when reason enters into its ecstatic state as revelation. By the end of the paper the comparisons between Kant's synthesis of the third critique and Tillich's dialectic of Logos and eros seem to raise more questions than provide a clear parallel. Yet, this may be quite helpful as the beginning place of a more detailed and fascinating exploration into the intellectual archeology of Tillich's thought regarding the relationship between Logos and eros.

4. Daniel Whistler, University of Oxford. "Tillich's Part in 'Schellingian Existentialism.'" This paper was not available for review.

**Second Session of the Tillich Society: Friday, 1:00-3:00 p.m. *Tillich, Church, and Society in Twentieth-Century Germany***

5. Marc Boss, Montpelier University. "Paul Tillich and the Twentieth Century Fichte Renaissance: Neo-Idealistic Features in His Early Accounts of Freedom and Existence." *Reviewed by Rob James.*

This paper is of absolutely first-rate importance. Anyone who has not read it is likely to have a seriously out-of-date understanding of Tillich.

In order to convey one pivotal aspect of the paper's importance, I go back in memory to 2000. In summer of that year, Marc Boss and I debated some of Tillich's thought in a Paris restaurant over beers—small French beers, not big German ones.

Marc kept saying, in effect, "Rob, Tillich is not that consistent. You are making him more systematic than he is." And I kept saying, "Marc, why do you Europeans spend so much time tracing the genetic-historical lines of changes and developments in Til-

lich's thought? That is necessary up to a point. But don't we really want to know how Tillich's insights hang together, systematically, in order that we can use his insights to deal with theological and philosophical problems?"

In the present paper, Boss shows that he had the better of our argument—in one sense. But in a larger sense, Boss's paper shows that we both won! That is to say: *by means of* a deep-digging, genetic-historical analysis, Boss demonstrates that Tillich's thought was more systematically unified, throughout almost his entire adult life, than most scholars have recognized. In particular, Boss shows that there was no "existential turn" at some middle point in the development of Tillich's thought, as so many interpreters have said there was. Even Schelling has received too much credit. Everything truly decisive was already there in Tillich, at least from 1911 forward, in his theological appropriation of Fichte's freedom and autonomy in terms of a Lutheran-style justification of the sinner as knower!

**6.** Swen Ensminger, Yale University. "In Hope He Believed Against Hope': Hope in the Theology of Paul Tillich." *Reviewed by Marcia MacLennan.*

Like a carry-on bag filled with the essentials, Swen Ensminger's paper gives a clear, compact summary of the main points in Paul Tillich's theology of hope, both in his system and in the sermons. Hope is "the tension of life toward the future." Every moment of life is full of anxiety, even despair, as non-being threatens being. Hope, therefore, cannot be merely an abstract idea but must speak to the human situation of finitude. Tillich knew about hope as a refugee in exile, yet he wrote about eternity and the expectation of peace. Hope is experienced on the border between the already and the not yet. Non-being is overcome by reconciliation, reunion, creativity, and meaning. This possibility of hope Tillich calls New Being. Hope, the anticipatory element in faith, promises ultimate fulfillment, just as a seed anticipates the promise of a flower. Hope is the person's experience of eternity now, despite the threat of meaninglessness.

Just as Ensminger is ready to close his carry-on bag he adds one more item—Pope Benedict's comparison with Tillich on hope, especially the need for a ministry of hope in our anxious world. He includes his bibliographic notes, naming other scholars, notably Moltmann, who have emphasized hope. Ensminger's goal for this paper is for scholars to open this carry-on bag and use Tillich's ideas as we

conceptualize hope in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a task needed today.

**7.** Adam Pryor, Graduate Theological Union. "Comparing Tillich and Rahner on Symbol." *Reviewed by Rob James.*

Though hard to follow, Pryor's paper has flashes of brilliance, and is worth struggling with. It examines the respective methods of Tillich and Rahner, and then, in the second half, compares their differing ideas of symbol. Pryor tries to show that the two ideas of symbol derive from each thinker's method, respectively. That appears to work for Rahner's transcendental method. But it seems backwards for Tillich. Tillich came up with "correlation" (probably after 1933) as the way in which theology should deal with religious symbols—which he had analyzed earlier, in "Das religiöse Symbol" of 1928. (In research to be published in late 2011, Prof. Erdmann Sturm of the University of Münster will show that Tillich's method of correlation dates only from 1934-35.)

But, to his credit, Pryor gives us a lucid explanation of Rahner's transcendental method. Pryor's explanation leads to Rahner's idea that we humans are symbols of God, an idea that I find highly provocative. It suggests what a *purely essentialist* Tillich might look like, namely, like Rahner! But Tillich is also existentialist. Thus he sees *ugly splits* between (a) the estranged way we exist and (b) the way our lives *would* unfold if we truly actualized our essential being—that is, if we actualized the unity of God and human life that is signaled in the symbol (compare Rahner). But there is hope in Tillich. Grace breaks through to us in religious symbols—for example, in preaching and sacrament—and those "ugly splits" are overcome, at least fragmentarily. Here Tillich's correlation method comes into its own. The task of theology is to correlate the symbols in the Christian message with the existential questions, or the aching lacks, that are our lot.

This role of correlation seems so clear in Tillich (see his "Theology and Symbolism," and ST I, 59-64) that it is jarring when Pryor adopts a proposal from Richard Grigg's *Symbol and Empowerment* (1985). Grigg finds a "hermeneutical correlation" implicit in the correlation work that Tillich directly pursues. Granted, Grigg is able to highlight certain aspects of Tillich's work-in-progress by taking note of this putative "hermeneutical" method. But Tillich never mentions any such thing, and when Pryor embraces it as "correlation" writ large, it becomes a bit of a trap for him. At different points in his paper he

develops implications of this would-be method and at one point surprisingly concludes, “Tillich’s systematic theology employs its methodology as a formal tool of reasoning. It is a structure for investigating reality and elucidating the fundamental unity of being that pervades all of life by Tillich’s assessment. This fundamental unity allows Tillich to employ his method of [hermeneutical] correlation across a vast range of...problems.... The method of correlation is the *Urbild* for theological formulation.”

I doubt that this is what Grigg meant. I feel confident it does not describe Tillich’s method of correlation. For one thing, what Pryor describes is philosophy on a rather grand scale, whereas Tillich’s “correlation” operates within theology, as shown above.

**8.** Kyle Schiefelbein, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley. “The Experience of Grace Revealed to the Church: Tillich and Rahner on Method and Sacrament.” *Reviewed by Rob James*.

In the mid-twentieth century, Lutherans and Roman Catholics had a series of dialogues on baptism and on the Eucharist. The latter failed to get very far, Schiefelbein believes, because they started from the Eucharist as sacrifice. That put the Lutherans at a disadvantage. Schiefelbein intends his paper as a contribution toward future discussions. He chooses a Lutheran and a Catholic theologian, Tillich and Rahner, and seeks to show how each develops a theology of the sacraments in general.

For this, he makes the concept of “the word” central. Though that gives an advantage to the Lutherans, Rahner is by no means “left behind.” For him the new task of theology is to work out the essential character of the word uttered in and through the Church as event of grace. Such an event is a sacrament; the Church is itself the sacrament of salvation—the *Grundsakrament* or basic sacrament for the others—because it effects what it signifies, and thereby perpetuates Christ’s saving presence in the world.

Most of Schiefelbein’s rendering of Tillich is valuable. But it and a 1989 Maxwell Johnson article on which it is partly based push Tillich closer to Catholicism than he seems to me to be when they say that, for Tillich, the sociological church is a sacrament. They reason thus: (a) the empirical church both participates in and points to the “Spiritual Community,” or living Body of Christ, and (b) those two qualities make it a symbol of the Spiritual

Community, because (c) symbol and sacrament are essentially the same.

I think “a” is correct. As to “b,” if something is to be a symbol, at least one other quality is required, namely, *Anerkanntheit*, or the symbol’s being accepted as such by a given religious community. At least among many Protestants, probably including Tillich, the empirical church *per se* is not so accepted—although churchly figures, rituals, accoutrements, etc. often are. As to “c,” symbol and sacrament do not completely coincide in Tillich. A symbol must negate as well as affirm itself so as *thereby* to point beyond itself. Sacraments are not infrequently loath to do those two things.

In his notes Schiefelbein correctly states that, in 1994, Langdon Gilkey said the Church is a symbol and a sacrament. But Gilkey’s Tillichianism often includes elements of (marvelous!) creative transformation; he is frank in *Gilkey on Tillich* that he departs from Tillich on “symbol” (105). And in context he treats the Church as a “theonomous symbol” more to deflate than to “pump up” the overly high estimate of Church implied in some of the Catholic articles on Tillich that Gilkey is responding to.

**Third Session of the Tillich Society: Friday, 4:00-6:00 p.m. Panel on Andrew Finstuen’s *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants: The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, Billy Graham, and Paul Tillich in an Age of Anxiety***

**9.** Daniel Peterson, Seattle University. First panelist’s response to the book. *Reviewed by Marcia MacLennan*.

What do Reinhold Niebuhr the prophet, Paul Tillich the professor, and Billy Graham the preacher have in common? In his new book, Andrew Finstuen maintains that this threesome of Protestants all believe that sin is a universal human condition; sin is a fact before it is an act. Daniel Peterson’s critique of Finstuen’s book stresses that in this threesome of Niebuhr, Tillich, and Graham on sin that Tillich and Niebuhr are much closer to each other than either is to Graham. Peterson’s critique centers on the comparisons and contrasts between Tillich and Graham. Both Tillich and Graham write and speak about original sin, a point sometimes overlooked when studying Graham’s ideas on sin, says Finstuen in his book. Peterson points out, however, that Graham writes mostly about sins as human errors that can be overcome by faith when persons turn to God. For Peterson, Graham’s concept of faith is really a hu-



man work, an action which humans can initiate to overcome sins and sin by turning their lives to God. Peterson points out that, for Tillich, faith comes from people's acceptance of grace as a free gift offered by God to humans who are in sin, that is, who are estranged from neighbor and God. Overcoming sin has a divine initiative. When a person is grasped by God and accepts God's grace, then the human condition of sin is overcome. Although both Graham and Tillich believe in and write about sin as a basic human condition, the most important difference between these two Christian thinkers is the placement of faith, either inside humans who decide to change (Graham) or outside humans as they are grasped by God's grace (Tillich).

**10.** Terry Cooper, St. Louis Community College. Second panelist's response to book. *Reviewed by Marcia MacLennan.*

We are not who we should be. In his new book Andrew Finstuen makes a convincing argument that the concept of sin is the original moment defining human life in the writings of Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, and Billy Graham. Cooper notes the differences among these three thinkers. For Niebuhr, sin is the human capacity to distort freedom, but Niebuhr gives little help in his writings for changing the human heart. For Tillich, although sin is the tragic human condition, Cooper points out that Tillich offers different words for sin (estrangement, alienation, and separation). In Graham's writings and speeches, sin is less clear than sins; he is moralistic and literal in his understanding of sins. Nevertheless, Cooper agrees with Finstuen that for Graham, sins do have behind them the human problem of sin.

Cooper questions just how "everyday" Niebuhr and Tillich are as Finstuen attempts to join them to Graham. All three were on the cover of *Time* magazine; all three appreciate and wrestle with the universal problem of sin in persons and in society; but Cooper disagrees that Niebuhr and Tillich are united with Graham in being "everyday" religious thinkers. Graham, the preacher on sins and sin in popular culture, is very different from Niebuhr, the prophetic voice who discusses sin in society, and from Tillich, the intellectual theologian who speaks of sin in psychological terms. However, Cooper affirms that these three mid-century religious thinkers all appreciate and address the problem of sin.

**11.** Andrew Finstuen, Boise State University. Reply to comments of Terry Cooper and Daniel Peterson. *Reviewed by Marcia MacLennan.*

Andrew Finstuen thanks his two panelists, Terry Cooper and Dan Peterson, for their thorough responses to his new book, and makes three closing statements to them. First, to Cooper, Finstuen says, that Niebuhr is not alone in discussing the social implications of sin; Graham does too in his speeches and writings. Second, to Cooper, Finstuen maintains his original position that the writings of all three thinkers, not just Graham's, were widely read and consumed by everyday Christians. Several examples of proof are given of this claim by Finstuen that Niebuhr's and Tillich's theological ideas were very popular and were read, studied, and understood by ordinary Christians. Third, to Peterson, Finstuen stands firm in his claim that faith for Graham is more than a human choice. Graham does not use the term "prevenient grace." However, for Graham, as for Niebuhr and Tillich, faith is a person's response to God's gift of mercy, love, and forgiveness. If Graham seems inconsistent, Finstuen reminds us, we must remember that Graham's purpose is always to bring people to Christ, and toward that end Graham's writings and sermons stressed the human side of faith, namely, the human response to God's initial love.

**Fourth Session of the Tillich Society: Annual Banquet, 7:00-10:00 p.m.**

**12.** Raymond F. Bulman, Saint John's University. The Banquet Address. "The Power of Tillich's Thought: A Nostalgic Retrospect." *Reviewed by Marcia MacLennan.*

We members of the audience at the 2009 North American Paul Tillich Society Banquet needed sturdy shoes for the walk down Memory Lane with Ray Bulman, back to the late 1960's and early 1970's. Bulman reflected on Paul Tillich's popularity and influence, and he expressed the excitement and passion scholars and students in that era had for Tillich's ideas. On the path we met five of Bulman's friends who developed Bulman's connection with Tillich from themes in Tillich's works.

At Union Seminary in the late 1960's, Bulman was introduced to Paul Tillich's theology by John Macquarrie. Bulman found he had to learn German and eventually had to follow Macquarrie to England. Then at Harvard Bulman met Harvey Cox who, like Tillich, had much to say about God in the secular

world. On the Tillich path we heard about Bulman's friend, Ted, who, when he was struggling with the emotional aspects of religion, found deep meaning in Tillich's concept of ecstasy as "standing outside one's self." We met Bill who was wrestling with the concept of angst and found Tillich's analysis of the human situation of finitude to speak to his personal life. Bulman was so concerned for his engineer friend Bruno, a brooding and lonely man, that Bulman gave him Tillich's sermon, "Loneliness and Solitude," to read. From that sermon Bruno found comfort in knowing that to be human often is to be alone, even when we are surrounded by friends and family.

Bulman's nostalgic walk with the audience down Tillich's Memory Lane also included Bulman's discovery of Tillich's confirmation verse, Matthew 11:28; Bulman's visit to Peter John's home in Vermont for Tillich tapes; and Bulman's conversations with James Luther Adams while drinking tea and eating toast with honey. Bulman hopes that scholars today can draw energy and vitality from this walk down his Memory Lane with Tillich and use these insights as we take our own walks with Tillich in these early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Fifth Session of the Tillich Society: Saturday, 9:00-11:30 a.m. *God and Being / God Above and Beyond Being and God***

**13.** Christopher Rodkey, Lebanon Valley College, "Is There a Gospel of New Atheism?" *Reviewed by Ron MacLennan.*

According to Rodkey, "gospel" and "new atheism" are not contradictory if Tillich is viewed as an atheist, based upon his insistence that God does not exist as a being among other beings. In fact, the so-called "New Atheism" is largely the same old atheism, attacking theistic religious literalism. Such atheism is not radical enough. Rodkey integrates Thomas Altizer's death of God theology into his paper in such a way that God's death is a perpetual reality, thereby grounding the gospel in a new Tillichian atheism. Tillich's sweeping program of deliteralization is thus taken beyond the death of God by legitimating and even mandating decide: "If your God can be killed, it should be" (Rodkey).

Thus, the problem with atheisms, old and new, is overcome. These problems include their failure to offer any self-transcending transformation. Atheism proclaims the good news of liberation from oppressive, heteronomous religion, but provides no con-

structive alternative adequate to the task. Tillich, in contrast, offers liberation from the false certainties of both theism and atheism and proclaims the gospel of New Being in Christ.

**14.** Carl-Eric Gentes, Luther College, "The Weakness of Being: A Tactical Encounter between Tillich's Doctrine of God and Michel de Certeau."

*Reviewed by Ron MacLennan.*

How in the modern world is divine action possible, if it is possible? Specifically, can Tillich's God, who is not a being, act?

Gentes, using Certeau's distinction between strategy and tactics, answers Yes, Tillich's God can be conceived as acting Christologically and apocalyptically. Strategy entails having a place of its own from which exterior threats can be managed; tactics has no place of its own but relies on "a clever utilization of time." The tactician's lack of an established place is transformed into a freedom of the moment. Theologically, a tactician God as being-itself "assumes a position of weakness." As a modern reinterpretation of the theology of the cross, Gentes's position is attractive and resonates with Tillich.

However, is not Tillich's God, whose chief activity is, as Gentes notes, revelation/salvation, necessarily both strategic and tactical? True, being-itself has no spatial boundary, but being-itself is the creator, redeemer, and destiny of all things, not bounded by them, but in them. Without a strategic God, God as only tactical is open to the truncations of Jesusology, in contrast to Tillich's Trinitarian Christology.

**15.** Christian Danz, University of Vienna and President, Deutsche Paul-Tillich-Gesellschaft. "Absolute Faith and the God above God: Tillich's New Interpretation of God." *Reviewed by Rob James.*

Danz is one of several who have contributed richly to keeping the German-speaking and the English-speaking groups of Tillich scholars connected. For some seven years, he has delivered a paper every year, in English, at a meeting of the AAR Tillich Group or NAPTS.

In the present paper, Danz does something analogous. He "connects" one of the most famous ideas of the American Tillich—the idea of the God above God and the related idea of absolute faith, as published in 1952 in *The Courage to Be*—with the same the same words as one finds them in the first draft of *Rechtfertigung und Zweifel* ("Justification

and Doubt”), a text written by the young German Tillich in 1919.

Danz says the thesis of his paper is “that the formula God above God represents a reflexive description of the self-understanding of a person in the act of faith. It describes with other words the dialectic of the faith itself and is an expression of the act of faith.” Because this is the thesis of the entire paper, it would appear that Danz believes it states the meaning of both the 1919 and the 1952 passages with which his paper deals.

At the end of his paper, Danz claims only to have shown “a high degree of continuity in the development of Tillich’s theology.” The paper as a whole *seems* to be making the stronger claim, however, that the 1952 and the 1919 doctrines are the same. One reason I am unsure about this is that, at several points, I cannot pin down what the English of Danz’s paper means. In some previous years, I have found it helpful to compare the German original of Danz’s paper. In this case, however, I learned that there was none. Danz composed the paper in English, and his wife put it into better English.

Not as a criticism, but as a question for discussion and clarification, I hazard the hypothesis that—in the texts with which Danz deals in this paper—the God above God of 1952 is distinguishable from the human self as the ground of that self, whereas the God above God in 1929 is the human self fully self-understood. I further hazard that in 1919 a limiting object is essential in order for the self to know itself in paradoxical faith, whereas in 1952 it is the disappearance of all objects that strips the self bare to such an extent that only absolute faith, faith without an object, is possible.

**First Session of the AAR Tillich Group: Monday, 9:00-11:30 a.m. *God above God: Tillich, Taylor, and the New Atheisms***

**16.** Glen Whitehouse, Florida Gulf Coast University. “Yes, Richard, Theology Is a Subject: Tillich’s *System of the Sciences* versus the Disciplinary Encroachments of the New Atheism.” *Reviewed by Charles Fox.*

In this conceptually rich and well-written essay, Whitehouse initially discusses the point of view expressed in three recent books from the “New Atheism” movement: works by Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, and Sam Harris. All three of these works treat the idea of God as an empirical explanatory hypothesis, and they move ineluctably to the conclu-

sion that this hypothesis is extremely improbable, given recent advances in biological and psychological evolutionary theory. Of course, all good Tillichians would expect this outcome, and would do so long before either the development of these scientific theories or their embodiment in these “tracts for the times.”

This discussion provides the *mise en scene* for Whitehouse’s transition to a summary of Tillich’s early work on *The System of the Sciences* (1923). The connection is established by the fact that these “atheist” authors have extended the reach of their biological theories to a negative reading of the epistemic status of reflection in the humanities and social sciences. Whitehouse wishes to connect Tillich to these authors around the issue of what constitutes a legitimate conceptual discipline, and from this footing he takes on their claims about the “applicability of biologicistic approaches to [these] areas of knowledge.” Their new “science of cultural transmission” provides a very interesting counterpoint with Tillich’s early interpretation of the problem of meaning.

Space does not permit me to elaborate on what follows in his essay, except to say that Whitehouse provides us a lucid and accurate summary of a convoluted and somewhat tedious essay by Tillich. This is quite helpful for Tillich scholars because this early work is so seminal for understanding Tillich’s later theological construction. The first seventy pages of ST I are in significant ways a distillation of his early essays on *The System of the Sciences* of 1923 and *Philosophy of Religion* of 1925.

**17.** Richard Grigg, Sacred Heart University. “The New Atheism, the God Beyond God, and the Phenomenology of Wonder.” *Reviewed by Charles Fox.*

This essay seeks to marshal resources from Tillich’s theology to respond to two recent works of “pantheistic theology,” works by Ursula Goode-nough and Sharman Apt Russell (the essay title is misleading). For the purposes of response, Grigg appeals to a familiar but very limited section of *The Courage to Be*—on the “courage of despair”—and in a general way to Tillich’s concept of “the God above God,” introduced at the very end of this most popular of all his books.

Grigg believes that Tillich can offer theological guidance to the views of these “pantheisms” in three areas: the appeal to an experience of religious wonder, the analysis of this experience as “ontological rather than merely ontic”—the latter being under-

stood by Grigg as an “accidental modifier of the self,” which is not Tillich’s use of this term—and finally, the more specific delineation of the “ontological dimension” as “the power of being”—again a formulation that needs to be tweaked a bit to fit Tillich). This essay does not explore any new ground, and somewhat surprisingly it never alludes to Tillich’s consistent effort to avoid association of his position with the term “pantheism.” Goodenough and Russell might find it theologically instructive to read Tillich’s discussions of the issue in ST I, 232ff, where Tillich introduces his own movement toward the newly fashionable terminology of “panentheism” (a term he first mentions in the *History of Christian Thought* lectures from the same writing period, p. 265), or again in his explicit embrace of this language at the very end of his *opus magnum* (ST III, 421).

**18.** David H. Nikkel, University of North Carolina, Pembroke. “Tillich’s God Above God after Mark Taylor’s *After God*.” *Reviewed by Charles Fox*.

Nikkel’s essay engages Tillich’s thought with some of the central theological ideas and arguments of Mark C. Taylor’s *After God*. This essay is so rich in referential detail and theoretical complexity (!) that I cannot possibly summarize it within the narrow confines here granted me. It is unfortunate for all of us that Tillich came so late in his conceptual development to the encounter with American process thought, a tradition within which Nikkel is clearly nurtured. Now that Taylor has embraced the theologically constructive implications of complexity theory, he more and more appears as a “latter day saint” within this community. By the end of ST III, and in some earlier more casual asides that go back to the period of writing ST I, Tillich had openly identified his peculiar blend of what he had called “naturalistic monism” and “idealistic monism” with the label “panentheism.” Nikkel helps us to understand how one may read Tillich’s verbal and conceptual trajectory in a fashion that allows us, as it were, to read Tillich against Tillich. At the same time he shows us how Tillich may provide a stabilizing corrective to Taylor’s heavy lean toward the destabilizing, disfiguring aspect of complexity process theory. As Tillich himself puts it at the end of ST III, 405, “the Divine Life is the eternal conquest of the negative,” but this outcome is not “a state of immovable perfection.” Tillich scholars: careful reflection on this essay amply repays the effort.

**19.** Daniel Boscaljon, University of Iowa. “What God Is Ultimate? Contrasting Tillich’s Different ‘Gods’ in Terms of Faith.” *Reviewed by Charles Fox*.

This essay develops an interesting line of argument that takes its point of departure from a brief reference to the recent work of Mark C. Taylor, *After God*. But the substance of the argument is focused on Tillich’s two most popular books, *The Courage to Be* (CB) of 1952 and *The Dynamics of Faith* (DF) of 1957. Boscaljon claims that Tillich argues toward different understandings of God and faith in these two works, and that the position developed in CB is likely to have the greater long-term persuasion, especially if Taylor’s book is any index of cultural trends.

In CB, Tillich wrestles with the existential emergence of a deep sense of meaninglessness, and speaks to this radical cultural situation with his idea of “the God above the God of theism,” to which reality a person responds with an “absolute faith” from which symbolic content has been evacuated. By contrast, five years later Tillich seems to want to affirm the practical spiritual necessity of symbolic content, even to approach his radically transcendent God. Faith lives through symbols, even if judged by the symbol of the Cross, which negates the ultimacy of all symbols, including itself. In sum, the God of DF is “less ‘above’” than that of CB.

Given the post-modern *nisus* toward relativizing all cultural contents, resulting in a kind of “neither/nor” attitude (as described by Taylor), we today experience more of a crisis of “meaningfulness” than the “shattering meaninglessness” that consumed a prior era. In our situation, “all actions carry a seemingly critical importance.” For this new world, Boscaljon believes that CB remains a relevant text, pointing the way toward a newer style of faith he rather abruptly, and obscurely, introduces as “vigilance.” Vigilant faith has three basic characteristics: it refrains from embracing any particular symbolic tradition, and thus it is also non-doctrinal, and it “does not require that one have an existential crisis in order to experience being grasped by the power of Being-itself.”

**Second Session of the AAR Tillich Group: Monday, 4:00-6:30 p.m. *Tillich in Dialogue with New Issues in Theology, Religion, and Culture***

**20.** Christopher Craig Brittain, University of Aber-

deen. "Tillich and Adorno: Two Approaches to a Theology of Correlation." *Reviewed by Loye Ashton.*

Brittain's paper wades fearlessly into the debate over the intellectual relationship between Paul Tillich and Theodor Adorno (and indeed, the Frankfurt School as such) with respect to the question of who influenced whom more, and in what respects. The issue at hand for Brittain is Tillich's "method of correlation" as applied to his theology of culture and how it was understood and appropriated by Adorno. The main argument is that Adorno "inverts" Tillich's theology of culture by using the method of correlation backwards: rather than seeing culture raising questions that theology would answer, Adorno uses theological questions to interrogate society, and then argues that only human beings can be expected to supply the answers. Tillich's critique of Marxist thought is that dialectical materialism is insufficiently grounded in an ultimate concern beyond human ability and that it doesn't take into consideration the existentially complicated situation of the human being's condition as "finite freedom." Adorno counters that Tillich's theological anthropology of finite freedom puts too much emphasis on salvation beyond history—"essentialization"—and that it fails to take seriously enough the need to solve humankind's historical problems within history. Tillich grounds the common human essence in finitude and freedom. Adorno grounds it in suffering and consciousness. Yet even in his rejection of Tillich's system, Brittain demonstrates how Adorno adopts his teacher's method by inverting it much the way Marx inverted Hegel. In this way, Adorno's "inverse theology" is his way of turning the correlation around between theology and culture. For Adorno, society does not generate questions for theology to answer, but rather theological questions become useful insofar as they can challenge the *status quo* of society, allowing for new insights and new ways of thinking into solving the problems of injustice and suffering. Brittain sheds new light on both the relationship of Tillich and Adorno, as well as on the structural changes that Adorno's "inverse theology" took in light of his differences from, but fond appreciation of, his teacher Paul Tillich.

**21.** Kayko Driedger Hesslein, "The (Dis)Integration of Judaism in Tillich's Theology of Universal Salvation." *Reviewed by Loye Ashton.*

Hesslein maintains that, in spite of Tillich's deep concern for Jewish philosophers, as well as his own appreciation of Judaism's prophetic critique of sac-

ramental and Trinitarian Christian theology, Tillich ultimately fails to avoid a supersessionist theology when it comes to his understanding of universal salvation. Tillich's theology of salvation is meant to be inclusive in that it applies first to history and then, through history, to individuals. The Kingdom of God is cosmic and universal and individuals are not ultimately separated from each other or history. For Tillich the salvation history of the Jewish people is a necessary, indispensable, and preparatory context without which the paradox of the cross would have been meaningless and ineffective. Tillich sees the significance of "Old Testament" Judaism in light of the uniqueness of the historical Jesus as the New Being of the Christ but cannot seem to account for the Judaism that then followed in the remaining centuries. This is particularly troubling since it is exactly this Judaism with which the German Lutheran churches had so much difficulty. In addition, for Tillich salvation for Jews in contemporary Judaism remains unfulfilled because its prophetic expectations are not yet historically manifest.

Hesslein brings here a strong critique of the adequacy of Tillich's soteriology to avoid supersessionism, especially with respect to "post-*Christi* Judaism." One possible solution would be to read Tillich's system as more open and accommodating to universal salvation. Such a universal salvation might allow for multiple immanent particularities of the New Being, throughout history and in the future. Tillich's system, thus read, would better accommodate the idea that certain events such as the Exodus (or the post-Exilic restoration) could function in Tillich's system as an historical "center" of fulfilled salvation for Jews in the same way that Tillich sees the Christ event functioning for Christians.

**22.** Peter Heltzel, New York Theological Seminary. "Economic Democracy after Empire: Paul Tillich, Evangelical Socialism, and the Global Crisis."

This paper was not available for review.

**23.** Devan Stahl, Vanderbilt University. "Paul Tillich's Theology Concerning Health and Chronic Disease." *Reviewed by Loye Ashton.*

Stahl provides here a succinct but effective critique of Tillich's conceptual language concerning the nature of disease and health as a metaphor for ontological normativity. Stahl points out how, by linking disease with estrangement, Tillich continues the stigmatization of illness through its association with transgression. In addition, Tillich also over-

looks the practical impossibility of defining wellness in terms of wholeness. Human beings are never whole under the conditions of existence so therefore wellness as salvation *qua* wholeness is not possible in human life. Interestingly, contemporary biological theories have shown that not only is disease an inherent part of the human condition, but that evolution cannot happen without it. In other words, disease is part of the process that defines who we are biologically. This means that any kind of “salve” which “essentializes” disease from the human condition also removes an integral part of what makes us human. Indeed, Tillich himself accepts this fact in his deep existential appreciation that it is only through our self-understanding of ultimate finitude (death itself) that we can be most deeply human. Stahl argues that reconciling this problem in Tillich’s thought requires that we reframe the link between estrangement and disease to one more properly situated—and perhaps more consistently situated in Tillich himself—within the context of natural finitude. All in all, Stahl’s essay is a powerful and very timely questioning of Tillich’s own contradictory ontological metaphors.

<sup>1</sup> This report in a slightly longer form is appearing in volume 6 (2011) of the “International Yearbook for Tillich Research/ Internationales Jahrbuch für die Tillich-Forschung/ Annales internationales de recherches sur Tillich.” edited by Prof. Dr. Christian Danz (Vienna), Prof. Dr. Marc Dumas (Sherbrooke, Canada), (Prof. Dr. Dr. Werner Schüßler (Trier), Prof. Dr. Mary Ann Stenger (Louisville, KY), and Prof. Dr. Erdmann Sturm (Münster), and published by Walter de Gruyter (Berlin/New York)

<http://www.degruyter.de/cont/glob/neutralMbw.cfm?rc=128397>. Appreciation is expressed to the editors and the publisher for permission to publish this report in *The Bulletin of the North American Paul Tillich Society*.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Robison B. James is Cousins Professor of Religion, Emeritus, University of Richmond, Richmond, Virginia. Dr. Charles Fox is Mentor of Cultural Studies, Emeritus, Empire State College, SUNY, Albany, New York. Dr. Ronald B. MacLennan is Professor of Religion, Bethany College, Lindsborg, Kansas. Ms. Marcia MacLennan is Associate Professor of Religion and of English, Kansas Wesleyan University, Salina, Kansas. Dr. Loye Ashton is Associate Professor Religion and Chair of the Department at Tougaloo College, Tougaloo, Mississippi.

<sup>3</sup> Already in vol. 37 of the *Bulletin* is paper 6. Forthcoming are papers 3 and 6. Copies of papers 4 and 22

were not available for this report or for publication in the *Bulletin*.

#### Editor’s Note:

The officers of the North American Paul Tillich Society express their deep appreciation to editor Robison James and his associates, Charles Fox, Ronald MacLennan, Marcia MacLennan, and Loye Ashton for their outstanding work in presenting a summary of the 2009 papers of both the NAPTS Meeting and the AAR Tillich Group Meeting in Montreal.

We are also grateful to the Deutsche-Paul-Tillich-Gesellschaft for their permission to publish a summary of the papers in this *Bulletin*.

A summary of the 2010 papers from the NAPTS and the AAR Group meeting in Atlanta will appear in a future *Bulletin*.

Any member of the society who wishes to receive a complete copy of any paper from the 2009 meeting may do so by contacting the editor.

Thank you.

If you have presented a paper to the NAPTS or the AAR Tillich Group in the last three years and it has not been published in the *Bulletin*, please forward it to the editor:  
 fparrella@scu.edu  
 Thank you.

## **The Officers of the North American Paul Tillich Society**

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**DIFFERENTIAL THINKING AND NEW AESTHETICS: POTENTIALIZATION, ESSENTIALIZATION, AND ART**

JARI RISTINIEMI

In *Woman at the Window*, Caspar David Friedrich was not only reproducing natural scenery but depicting how the outer scene affects the individual: the shape of the woman tells about her state of mind; she is wondering what's happening on the outside. This is one part of the setting; the other part is that her shape affects the spectator and gives him or her a sense for an outside world. There is the seen and there is the sensed; the sensed is an opening up in relation to the represented. The sensed gives access to a world: the seen and the sensed make up a differentiated whole.

During Friedrich's lifetime the differential view came through in Schelling as well: "Activity and receptivity are related to one another as opposed terms [+ and -]. Thus, as the one factor increases, the other falls, and vice versa... Activity and receptivity arise simultaneously in one and the same indivisible moment, and precisely this simultaneity of activity and receptivity constitutes life."<sup>1</sup> Friedrich and Schelling were contemporaries, and Schelling's philosophy influenced Friedrich rather early.<sup>2</sup> Schelling saw the interaction between activity and receptivity, activity and passivity on all levels of life, the interaction dependent on two basic forces of expansion and contraction.<sup>3</sup> In humans, humans as miniature-beings or organisms,<sup>4</sup> the activity of conscious apprehension and the passivity of receptivity oscillate in the same moment; activity and passivity play with each other and collide, giving the presuppositions for the synthesis of personality.<sup>5</sup> In Schelling there is no binary opposition between thinking and feeling or sensing, activity, and passivity. The kind of thinking that comprises opposite elements and sees these as parts of the same constellation might be called differential thinking. Differential thinking during Schelling's lifetime was also in Kierkegaard.<sup>6</sup> Differential thinking combines the plus and the minus, but it does not operate within the frames of reflection only, but it opens itself up for sensing. In sensing, there are different levels or dimensions to be found: there is the *subjective reflexivity* going on in the subject; there is the *societal reflexivity* going on in the group and society; there is the *being-oriented intuition*. All these levels of sensing are to be found in contemporary philosophy and aesthetics. Differ-

ential thinking at its basic levels finds difference in being, it orients out of being, elaborating with expressive meaning: things are to be known out of themselves.<sup>7</sup> Schelling's is the being-oriented intuition.

In Mark C. Taylor, there is the societal reflexivity. Economical processes do not necessarily follow the logic of cause and effect, but the colliding of active and passive agents is operative in economics as well. The economic processes are explained and understood as self-organizing systems with logic of their own and their explanatory elements are the active and the passive agents affecting each other and colliding with each other, creating the global economic system.<sup>8</sup> In the Enlightenment discourse, on the other hand, the autonomous rational part of the self is supposed to control the sensing and feeling part, especially the reactive elements of the self. The Enlightenment discourse builds on the binary opposition between mind and body, thinking and receptivity, activity and passivity; one moves within the frames of reflection or subjective reflexivity only. The Enlightenment discourse could not break free from the binary opposition between mind and body. The binary oppositions and the coding out of these are questioned in philosophy and in new aesthetics. Recent art, like videos of Tamy Ben-Tor and the "documentary" by Casey Affleck of Joaquin Phoenix, which by now is recognized as a fake, play out the passive-reactive idiosyncrasies.

It is as if the new aesthetics and contemporary art asked how much of the passive-reactive elements humans are able to bear, in order to make another way of relating possible; art awakens the mind by letting the passivity of mind collide with the activity of mind. Through opening up for the otherness of the rational discourse and through its focus on both passive and active elements, the new aesthetics and the new art stick to Schelling: "But it is necessarily always the case that the higher is at the same time what grasps and recognises the lower."<sup>9</sup> By playing out the lower, for example the passive-reactive patterns, the new art opens up for a new way of relating, for a new societal milieu, which gives space for otherness, for the Other, and for those societal values that promote the human potential. Aesthetics are combined with ethics today. The new art fights the excluding global trend, with the racism and xenophobia we witness in Europe just now. The new art lets the passive and active actors and elements collide and, through this very colliding, it creates space for the new: for the possibility of new synthesis in the individual, in the society and in the world. What

is more, it strives for sense-making, meaning-making, and reality-making as well. According to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who build on the differential thinking, art is an oppositional force: in a world where everyone is supposed to be orderly, art resides in the darkness, in the becoming of the mass-people and the chaos-people, in those regions where new worlds are about to be formed.<sup>10</sup> Art is about the first-forms in the becoming of a world.<sup>11</sup> In Taylor, in Tamy Ben-Tor, in Deleuze and Guattari, and perhaps even in Casey Affleck, differential thinking is present.

Potentialization in Schelling and essentialization in Tillich are also run by the differential thinking: there is the beheld and there is the sensed in both, the + and the-, playing with and against each other.<sup>12</sup> Schelling in his potentialization and Tillich in his essentialization let the opposites come together: the more one is able to take in of the opposites, the higher the degree of the possibility of potentialization respective of the essentialization. The more of the minuses one is able to take in and accept, the higher the possibility of the synthesis. In essentialization it is the synthesis of personality (it is with this human part of essentialization that we deal with here) that creates the change.<sup>13</sup> In potentialization and in essentialization, the recent discussions of the nature and the role of art in the society and in the universe were foreshadowed. It seems to be the case that recent aesthetic theories deal with the similar themes as Schelling and Tillich did. Today's art deals with dimensions of being where the first-forms come into being, and ontological discussions are not denied in the new aesthetics. Art reclaims not only the streets today but ontology as well.

### **Potentialization and Essentialization as Reality-making through Art**

Life, in Schelling's view, was seen as a play of differential elements and forces: "generally only the positive factor is beheld, and the negative is only felt."<sup>14</sup> Applied to art the seen is the "beheld," the representation, the painting on the wall; the sensed is the felt. Schelling made use of differential thinking: there is the interaction between conscious apprehension or thinking (activity) and feeling or sensing (receptivity). And more, in thinking both conscious and unconscious elements are in play; thinking is a matter of whole person, and both the conscious and the unconscious are comprised in this kind of thinking. Ideas incubate in the unconscious and break out into

conscious thinking.<sup>15</sup> Thinking becomes a matter of sensing: of seeing, hearing, and feeling, even in a metaphysical sense. Thinking not only deals with that which one represents in one's mind in the form of mental images, but also with that what one is able to sense in interaction with others and one's world. Today's neurophysiology points out that sensing or feeling is an essential part of thinking.<sup>16</sup> Sensing, then, is the other of reflection, the other of the abstract thinking. Deleuze has pointed to the differential thinking in Schelling: "The God of love and the God of anger are required in order to have an idea. A, A<sup>2</sup>, A<sup>3</sup> form the play of pure depotentialization and potentiality, testifying to the presence in Schelling's philosophy of a differential calculus adequate to the dialectic."<sup>17</sup>

Potentialization in Schelling seems to be that of the synthesis between active and passive forces both in universal being and in human persons; a dynamic coming together of the opposite elements and forces; the synthesis on the human level is something to be felt. Depotentialization is the shattering of the synthesis, also a matter of feeling or sensing; *I am still here* with Joaquin Phoenix sending shockwaves through the global media landscape. New aesthetics shatters the civilization; art is on the spirit-level and so are potentialization-depotentialization and essentialization too.

On Schelling's ontological map or setting there are several instances of potentialization: A, between the being itself and the coming into being of the finite world; A<sup>2</sup>, in the duplication of the infinite into two, there is the infinite in itself and the concrete material being or the universe; A<sup>3</sup>, between the concrete material being, or the Real, the ultimate goal and meaning of the universe, the Ideal.<sup>18</sup> This is Schelling's ontological map or setting. Schelling's is the world with spiritual impulses. The eruptions of potentialization create the possibility of evolution. There are strong parallels between potentialization and essentialization on different levels.

Schelling moved away from the representational view on art: the most important themes cannot be represented since a painting is not a naturalistic reproduction of images but powers and forces of being might be expressed in and through art; painting is a manifestation or an expression.<sup>19</sup> In art there is expressed the constructive "part" of becoming and it is here that artist becomes a means of potentialization. The relation between the being itself, or the infinite, and the concrete material being, or the finite, becomes discernible in art and it is in this context we



also find the work of artists. Art or artists not only represent the concrete world, but they also affect and form the coming into being of a world, and more, the artist in Schelling's view is a co-creator—he or she is making a new world. An artist makes potentialization possible; an artist is a maker of potentialization. The artist is a co-operator and a co-creator, an active agent, in the coming into being of a concrete world. When Adorno says that artwork leaves the empirical and creates another world,<sup>20</sup> Schelling takes another route down into the recesses of the empirical. The artist is engaged in the “real production”; in his or her work “spirit itself which has the power to bring forth or create the material” is manifest.<sup>21</sup> The artist is active in the very act of spiritual creation, including the creation of matter, the level A of potentialization. This view is far from the position of post-modernity in which the artist only deals with the signs and replica, with the simulated.

In Friedrich's *Moonrise Over the Sea*, there is expressed a refined sensitivity and receptivity in the three figures gazing out to the sea; they are caught in the same mood or the state of mind. Ships coming to the shore in Friedrich's art are usually symbolic vessels: they come to take humans from the land of the living to that of the dead; they are symbols of the ultimate limit of organic life. In intuition or in sensing, in “intellectual intuition,” so Schelling, the humans are able to sense non-being and the presence of death in all the living, the minuses threatening the meaning and sense of life.<sup>22</sup> Potentialization and its driving forces struggle with death, with depotentialization in the experience of non-being and in the experience of loss of meaning and orientation. Non-being is here, not that of the absolute non-being, but the relative non-being that denies the plus.<sup>23</sup> We might say that the experience of the minus is a necessary but not the sufficient condition of potentialization.

In *Moonrise Over the Sea*, both the negative and the positive seemed to have been expressed. There is the limit, death, and non-being to be overcome, the boundary between the land and the sea, between the living and the dead. And there is more: perhaps the light in the painting, the positive, not only comes from the sun and the moon, but perhaps it also comes from the infinite? The higher that makes us to recognize the lower is the light of the eternal that holds the scene. The eternal is present in the concrete universe; sensibility gives access to the Eternal. In Schelling's view, sensibility is not only a human capacity, but it is participation in the universal life.<sup>24</sup>

In his philosophy of nature, Schelling points out the *actans*. *Actans* in Schelling's view are not measurable material powers, powers that might be quantified or proved by scientific means as is the case with the measurable objects, but *actans* are at the ground level of matter, at that level upon which physical matter comes into being, and expands and contracts itself into the concrete material world. Physics or natural sciences deal with matter, with the finished concrete being and those laws that make up the mechanics of matter; philosophy in Schelling's view knows about *actans*, about those potentials that underlie matter; *actans* or potentials come before the matter. *Actans* are the matter of matter, the potentials that constantly “bomb” the matter and give it its first-forms.<sup>25</sup> The matter at its basic level, so Schelling, is made of the potentials or the *actans*; *actans* seem to be in contact with the first-forms of matter. An artist and a philosopher stand in contact with the *actans*. In *Moonrise Over the Sea*, the matter of matter, the first-forms, and the potentials seem to be expressed in the foreground. It might be said that Friedrich expresses the potentials that make up the first formation of the continuous creation: the first-forms of the coming into being of the concrete world. In this painting it is the first-forms that carry the humans, the evolution is there, and the light generated by actans comes from the matter itself or the Eternal that “grounds” the matter. Schelling claims that the actans are in existence, the work of potentials on the concrete material world might be experienced in intuition: experience gives access to these realms of being; the “higher empiricism” is able to reveal the nature of being.<sup>26</sup> Caspar David Friedrich seemed to have captured something essential of Schelling's philosophy of nature, as well as of *actans* or natural monads, as Schelling also calls them. An artist and a philosopher of nature have come into contact with the *actans* or the first potentials and he or she knows that the world has its potential and constructive dimension. The philosopher and the artist or the artist-philosopher works with these very potentials of being. The potentials of being play such a central role in Tillich's *Systematic Theology*, III! Further, his theory of art claims that the Eternal or the infinite breaks through in art. Both potentialization and essentialization presuppose the potentials of being or of universal life. The work of an artist both in Schelling and in Tillich is to bring forth a reality out of the potential realm.

In essentialization, the individual personality comes to a new synthesis of the opposite elements.

For Tillich the opposite, the [—] is the loss of meaning and the loss of orientation in the multi-dimensional universe.<sup>27</sup> The [+] is the new synthesis, that what one has made out of the potentials of one's life in interaction with the potentials of the universe. It is this [+] that is brought to divine life or the universal life in essentialization. To sense non-being, the anxiety of finite existence, the possibility of death and all other threats of finite existence might lead to depotentialization, the meaning of life and orientation in life is lost. Essentialization in Tillich is a radical overcoming of depotentialization (the negation of the negativities of human existence) in the individual, in the society, and in the universe: it is the conquest of the opposite possibility. Essentialization links activity, truth, and aesthetics: "There is no truth which is not also "done"... and there is no aesthetic expression which is not also a reality."<sup>28</sup> Here Tillich touches Schelling's potentialization: the artist brings forth a reality. Human spirit and human cultural creativity is co-operative with and in the Spiritual creativity.<sup>29</sup> Essentialization deals with the sense-, meaning-, and reality-making; the reality-making in the ontological sense happens also in art in Tillich's view. The reality-making in the ontological sense is that what an artist in Schelling's view does in potentialization or in artistic creation. The sense-making, both as consciousness of the depth of reason and as the widening of senses, the dynamic/vital standpoint, is also to be found in both of them.

In essentialization the new and the positive, the new synthesis created in existence, brings a new element to the divine life and changes even God: human action enriches God.<sup>30</sup> In Schelling we find the idea that for God to be a living God there must be change in God. There is otherness in God's being; there is the overcoming of the radical otherness in God.<sup>31</sup> This makes God into a living and *changing God*. Tillich also admits otherness in God and he points out that otherness in God makes God into a living God.<sup>32</sup> The otherness in God implies that God goes out of Godself and risks Godself in the life-process and in the universe. The notion of God both in Schelling and in Tillich is open-ended; God is inclined to change. Tillich thought that human life and action have an impact on the nature of God. The human action in history loads God and changes God's nature and being. Humans are not passive "receivers" in relation to God, but active agents in interaction with the universal life. Even Kierkegaard admitted change in God, and he also seemed to ad-

mit that human action changes God. He discusses the changing God in relation to human action and in relation to the synthesis of personality.<sup>33</sup> In Kierkegaard's view, there are two kinds of synthesis of personality: the one in which one lives more or less at the mercy of one's surroundings and in which one is determined from the outside. It is with the first synthesis that Tame Ben-Tor deals with in her art, presupposing the second synthesis. In the second synthesis, which is the matter of the inwardly directed action, the individual has reached a new synthesis of personality through his or her choices. The choice being the act or the action in which the individual "puts an end to the mere possibility and identifies him- or herself with the content of his or her thought in order to exist in it."<sup>34</sup> To exist in the content of one's thought does not presuppose abstract thought, but it presupposes differential thinking with its dimensions of sensing. In passivity, nothing human should be strange to one. Kierkegaard seemed to have thought that this second synthesis of human personality, a reached stage of existence, a spirit-determined existence, enriches and changes God. This is exactly the same view as Tillich had!

In Tillich, it is the new synthesis reached in existence that enriches God. The colliding of the + and the —, the play between the positive and the negative elements, makes the new synthesis of personality possible. Human activity and human action, the new reached synthesis for Kierkegaard and for Tillich, affect and change God. Human action partakes in the reality-making of the universal life. Kierkegaard did not think that aesthetics or art has an ontological impact; he discussed art often in relation to the first synthesis or the first immediacy, but he admitted that "the subjective thinker is...an artist. Existing is an art."<sup>35</sup> He even admitted that the subjective thinker stands in relation to the potential realm, by "the intensification of subjectivity" he or she brings the potentials to materialization and realization.<sup>36</sup> Both Schelling and Tillich seemed to have opened for art and for praxis to deal with the reality-making even in the ontological sense. This is also what we find in the new aesthetics.

### **Synthesis and Interaction: The Autopoietic Loop**

In his discussion of different types of interpretation, Jacques Derrida introduces "performative interpretation." Interpretation within the frames of the subject-object distinction tries to bring forth the meaning of objective state of affairs. The performa-

tive interpretation, on the other hand, changes “the thing” it interprets. Derrida takes his point of departure in the philosopher’s will to change the world.<sup>37</sup> The question comes to the difference between the semiotic meaning and the expressive meaning. The semiotic meaning, if it is defined on the axis between the signifier and the signified, presupposing the binary opposition between the two, lends meaning in words and through linguistic means. The semiotic meaning in this sense is a matter of representational order, which presupposes the subject-object distinction and the binary opposition; only objects might be represented. The expressive meaning, when things are allowed to express themselves through themselves and through their own means, opens up for the manifestation of sense-making, meaning-making, and reality-making; the expressive meaning is from below. We also find the performative strategy, the expressive meaning and the discussion of the relationship between the linguistic meaning and the expressive meaning in the new aesthetics of Erica Fischer-Lichte.<sup>38</sup> Fischer-Lichte discusses the difference between the two types of meaning in her *The Transformative Power of Performance*. She challenges the hegemony of the binary opposition between mind and body, the signifier and the signified, language and reality/experience.<sup>39</sup> The binary opposition is not an option any more, neither in philosophy nor in aesthetics, just as the art-experience is no longer about observation or about a passive detached attitude, but ethics, aesthetics, and politics melt into each other more and more today.<sup>40</sup>

Fischer-Lichte talks about performance as sense-making, meaning-making, and reality-making.<sup>41</sup> Performance is outside the frames of the subject-object distinction as it is outside the representational mode, but it is not a senseless event, even if this sense cannot be fully put in words. Given the subject-object distinction, it is possible to interpret the “objective” meaning of a play, in performance sense-making, meaning-making, and reality-making that happens among the participants. In performance, the “autopoietic self-organisational loop” is in act; the same kind of description of the self-organizational loop is to be found in Mark C. Taylor as well.<sup>42</sup> The autopoietic loop brings together both the passive and the active elements of theatre: the “passive” audience and the “active” actors, at the same time as it creates something new for all the participants.<sup>43</sup> By doing this, the autopoietic loop creates societal reflexivity.<sup>44</sup> What characterises the performance is the new synthesis among the actors; the theatre-event is

created in the power of the autopoietic loop; the performance has been allowed to have its way. The passive audience turns into active actors, the active actors become passive; both the audience and the spectators get their activity and passivity on and both have a share in a common thing—they partake in something that cannot be rendered in words. Such a “letting go” makes meaning fleeting, and several interpretations of what the performance is about are possible; it touches the senses, widens the reality of senses, makes participants conscious of their corporeality, and of their being-there in time and place; it makes reality in time and space, not above or beyond time and space.<sup>45</sup>

The interpretative setting of theatre during the 18<sup>th</sup> century started with the observational stance: there is the audience watching the play and there is the scene with its actors. The actors are active and the spectators are passively observing the action on the stage. In the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this state of affairs changed (this happened at the same time as Expressionism came to the fore in painting): the subject-object view gave way to the participating view. The spectators are asked to take part in the performance and to become active actors in the theatre-space. Audience was invited to act and to create the meaning and the reality of the performance. The only activity discernible in some theatres was that audience left the room! The point, however, was to make audience aware of their activity and their role in making theatre; to make them aware that the play is a common act between the actors and the audience. Performance is a creation going on between participants and in the participants. The autopoietic loop affects all participants and each and every one by his way of acting or not-acting makes the loop and the “communal” synthesis possible. The autopoietic loop is a synthetic act; it goes on between the participants. It collects the play, gives it sense, meaning, and reality, and direction, or no direction at all. There is a bodily and emotional affection going on between the participants, an affection that “touches” the conscious and the unconscious, the active and the passive elements of personality. It puts all the participants on test and brings them to a new level of sensing, meaning, and reality-making. The explanation comes only afterwards, if there is any need for any explanation. The performance is a social event, gathering and binding people in a common experience; it has a political-spiritual impact. It changes the human self-understanding and

affects the entire group in which it operates and is active; through this change it changes the world.

In Erica Fischer-Lichte's view the autopoietic loop is a collective feature; it is the "engine" of the group in the state of performance. While the actors play, their performative actions change the play: the play is what participants make out of it; a common thing is manifest among the participants thanks to the autopoietic loop. The performance for Fischer-Lichte is a societal event, which gets it transformative power out of the reflexive autopoietic loop, out of the colliding of the passive and the active elements. But she does not only consider that the performance is on the societal level. She also is open for reality-making as well: that what happens in the group is not indifferent for the society or for the reality and the meaning of life.<sup>46</sup>

In new aesthetics, the binary oppositions between artist and audience, body and mind, art and life are passed by; art, ethics, and truth together make up a new field of action-performance beyond the binary categories. The loop is not a vicious circle as the phases of the loop; its energy and elements are identifiable. The participants, perhaps, only stand still, are not in the same participant-position after the event; their perceptual patterns considering themselves, their world, and their universe are changed. The loop has synthetic power: it creates individual and collective synthesis. The autopoietic loop is a synthesis in the societal event, a kind of a group synthesis, which takes charge of several individuals, in which all participants are involved. Such loops are to be found on several levels: in individuals, in the societal levels, and perhaps even in humanity at large. It is obvious that Tillich thought that the synthesis at one point in the universe affects other points and dimensions of the universe, even non-human life, and it brings about the change in universal life, inclusive human life and divine life. This means that community or communion between individuals, society, and universal life does not only happen on the conscious plane, but there are unconscious influences as well, affections in humanity and in all life between all living things.

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<http://www.the-art-world.com/history/romanticism3.htm>

<sup>1</sup> Schelling 2004:65.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.the-art-world.com/history/romanticism3.htm> 2010-10-20, 10:03.

<sup>3</sup> "A second force, one specifically different from the first, must be accepted which acts in the *absolutely* opposite direction in relation to the repulsive force and which makes infinite expansion impossible—attractive force. (...) If, seen from the highest standpoint, all productive

activity of Nature was only an infinite evolution from one original involution, it must be this negative factor [no longer a *product*] that inhibits the evolution of Nature, hinders it from reaching the end." Schelling 2004: 75ff.

<sup>4</sup> "The organism is only the contracted, miniaturized image of the universal organism." Schelling 2004:143.

<sup>5</sup> "A tendency to restoration must also exist in the organism. But this tendency can only proceed [like *all* activity] from the higher organism, thus the higher organism must be able to be determined to activity by the passivity of the lower. This is not possible unless a plus of activity [i.e., action] in the higher is conditioned by a minus of activity on the lower" Schelling 2004:118. "There is developed out of nature a new being whose soul must be all the more perfect the more differentiatedly it contains what was left undifferentiated in the other." Schelling 1992:37.

<sup>6</sup> "But what everyone does not know, so that it counts as differential knowledge, that is a glorious thing to be concerned with." Kierkegaard 1974:80.

<sup>7</sup> Schelling 2007; Kierkegaard 1974; Levinas 2007; Deleuze 1994; Fischer-Lichte 2008

<sup>8</sup> "Reflexivity (in economics) is a nonlinear relation in which cause and effect are interdependent: the thought and actions of agents influence the operation of the system, which, in turn, influences the thought and actions of agents." Taylor 2004:285.

<sup>9</sup> Schelling 1994:117.

<sup>10</sup> "There is extracted from chaos the shadow of the "people to come" in the form that art, but also philosophy and science, summon forth: mass-people, world-people, brain-people, chaos-people—nonthinking thought that lodges in the three, like Klee's nonconceptual concept or Kandinsky's internal silence." Deleuze & Guattari 1996:218.

<sup>11</sup> "Can this becoming, this emergence, be called Art? (...) The artist: the first person to set out a boundary stone, or to make a mark. (...) The expressive is primary in relation to the possessive; expressive qualities, or matters of expression, are necessarily appropriative and constitute a having more profound than being." Deleuze & Guattari 1998: 316.

<sup>12</sup> "And since there is nothing merely negative [the negative lives from the positive it distorts], nothing that has being can be ultimately annihilated." Tillich 1976:399.

<sup>13</sup> "The new which has been actualized in time and space adds something to essential being, uniting it with the positive which is created within existence, ... Participation in the eternal life depends on a creative synthesis

of a being's essential nature with what it has made of it in its temporal existence." Tillich 1976:400f.

<sup>14</sup> Schelling 2004:207

<sup>15</sup> "Only out of the darkness of unreason [out of feeling, out of longing, the sublime mother of understanding] grow clear thoughts Schelling 1992:35.

<sup>16</sup> Damasio 1994.

<sup>17</sup> Deleuze 1994:191.

<sup>18</sup> Schelling 1994:114ff.

<sup>19</sup> "But as it has already been said that it itself could at no time and via no progression become an object, but remains as ruling over everything, then no further relationship to human consciousness can be thought that that of simple manifestation." Schelling 1994:127.

<sup>20</sup> "Artworks detach themselves from the empirical world and bring forth another world, one opposed to the empirical world as if this other world too were an autonomous entity." Adorno 2004:2.

<sup>21</sup> "As that which brings forth, it will now manifest itself in a human being by a bringing forth, by real production; it will show itself (1) as that which has the power over material, over matter to overcome it and compel it to be the expression of spirit, indeed of the highest ideas themselves—fine art just *as* fine art goes this far, but in (2) Poetry [*Poesie*], which is presupposed by fine art and to which the former itself only relates as a tool, in Poetry it will manifest itself as spirit itself which has the power to bring forth or create the material as well. The highest truth and excellence of the plastic work of art does not just consist in the correspondence with the created being or the model of the created being, but rather in the fact that the spirit of nature itself appears to have brought it forth; in it an activity is revealed, therefore, which is itself not of the kind which is created but rather in which one thinks one is seeing the creator." Schelling 1994:128.

<sup>22</sup> See Durwood Foster citing Ingeborg Henkel's description of Schelling's "Essentifikation" in Hummel & Lax 2000:369.

<sup>23</sup> Considering the relative non-being in Schelling see Bowie 1993:96.

<sup>24</sup> "The cause of *sensibility* is thus the cause of every organism and sensibility itself is the source and origin of life. *The cause of sensibility... must be found in the ultimate conditions of Nature itself.*" Schelling 2004: 114-6.

<sup>25</sup> "This matter, which is only the first being-something itself ... is rather itself the matter of this matter, namely of matter which is already formed, is sensuously knowable by us, and is endowed with sensuous attributes, its material, its basis." Schelling 1994:118.

<sup>26</sup> "An infinite multiplicity of original actans is in existence [how these arise will be precisely the ultimate

problem of the philosophy of nature].” Schelling 2004:28. “Empiricism itself, then, allows a higher way of looking at things, or can be grasped from a higher perspective than the received, or, at least since Kant, the usual concept grasps it, which expels everything intelligible not only beyond the concepts of the understanding, but originally and first of all beyond all experience. Hence the now usual explanation that empiricism denies everything supernatural, but this is not the case.” Schelling 1994:190.

<sup>27</sup> “There is “the absolute seriousness of the threat to “lose one’s life” with the relativity of finite existence. The conceptual symbol of “essentialization” is capable of fulfilling this postulate (the restitution of everything), for it emphasizes the despair of having wasted one’s potentialities yet also assures the elevation of the positive within existence [even in the most unfulfilled life] into eternity.” Tillich 1976:407.

<sup>28</sup> Tillich 1976:403.

<sup>29</sup> “Culture as spiritual creativity becomes, at the same time, Spiritual creativity.” Tillich 1976:403.

<sup>30</sup> See Schüssler & Sturm 2007:197.

<sup>31</sup> “The subject going through nature is also God, only not *as* God—thus God only *outside* His divinity or in his externalization [*Entäußerung*] or in His otherness [*Anderheit*], as an other of Himself, *as* which He only is at the end. ... God is obviously in part involved in a process, and in order precisely to be at least *as* God, is subjected to a Becoming.” Schelling 1994:133

<sup>32</sup> “There is no blessedness where there is no conquest of the opposite possibility, and there is no life where there is no “otherness”. Tillich 1976:421.

<sup>33</sup> “The religious lies in the dialectic which governs intensification of inwardness, and hence it is sympathetic with the conception of God that He is Himself moved, changed.” Kierkegaard 1974:387n.

<sup>34</sup> Kierkegaard 1974:302.

<sup>35</sup> Kierkegaard 1974:314. “The aesthetic corresponds to immediacy.” *Ibid.* p. 383.

<sup>36</sup> “The subjective reflection turns its attention inwardly to the subject, and desires in this intensification of inwardness to realize the truth.” (175) “Within the individual there is a potentiality [the individual is potentially spirit] which is awakened in inwardness to become a God-relationship, and then it becomes possible to see God everywhere.” (220f) Kierkegaard 1974.

<sup>37</sup> See Derrida 1994:51ff.

<sup>38</sup> See Fischer-Lichte 2008. “First and foremost, the actions of the actors and spectators signified only what they accomplished. They were self-referential. By being both self-referential and constitutive of reality, they ...

can be called “performative” in J. L. Austin’s sense.” Fischer-Lichte 2008:141

<sup>39</sup> Performances “set in motion oppositional binaries that have been central to occidental culture since antiquity, such as subject vs. object, body vs. mind, and sign vs meaning...” “Subject” and “object” no longer form an opposition but merely mark different states or positions of the perceiving subject and the object perceived which can occur consecutively or, in some cases, simultaneously”. Fischer-Lichte 2008:171.

<sup>40</sup> Performances “postulate that the aesthetic melts into the social, the political, and the ethical”. Fischer-Lichte 2008:172. Jorge Goia, giving expression for the Brazilian experience of Soma groups writes: “When we give up imperatives of ‘Truth’, ethics comes close to aesthetics, and science flirts with the arts. Soma (Freire’s experimental pedagogic) can be approached both as a live art form and as activism, envisaging a radical participatory, collaborative practice, where one can live singular experiences. With this experimental format, Soma could be a form of political engaged live art that aims to challenge the authoritarian or submissive behavior that we discover in our daily lives. It encourages perception and awareness of how this behavior produces authoritarian systems, and aims to extend this awareness to other areas of our lives, to resist and to react against hierarchy and social injustice.” Grindon, G., 2008:61.

<sup>41</sup> “The performance brings forth hits materiality exclusively in the present and immediately destroys it again the moment it is created, setting in motion a continuous cycle of generating materiality.” (76) “Meaning cannot be separated from materiality or subsumed under a single concept. Rather, meaning is coterminous with the object’s material appearance.” (156) Fischer-Lichte 2008.

<sup>42</sup> “The feedback loop as a self-referential, autopoietic system enabling a fundamentally open, unpredictable process emerged as the defining principle of the theatrical work.” Fischer-Lichte 2008:39. Even Mark C. Taylor points out the synthetic act: “Paradoxically, there can be no individuals without the group and no group without individuals. As a result of this interconnection, subjects and groups are bound in loops of mutual influence.” Taylor 2004:284.

<sup>43</sup> “In the process of generating meaning the subjects experience themselves actively as well passively, neither as fully autonomous subjects nor totally at the mercy of inexplicable forces. This binary opposition simply does not hold any longer.” Fischer-Lichte 2008:155.

<sup>44</sup> “The perceiving subjects begin to perceive themselves self-reflexively, thus opening up a further sphere of

meaning and influence on the perceptual dynamics.” 2008:150.

<sup>45</sup> “The aesthetics of the performative reveals itself as a “new” Enlightenment. It does not call upon all human beings to govern over nature—neither their own nor that surrounding them—but instead encourages them to enter into a new relationship with themselves and the world” Fischer-Lichte 2008:207.

**COMPARING TILlich AND RAHNER ON  
SYMBOL: EVIDENCING THE MODERNIST/  
POSTMODERNIST BOUNDARY**

ADAM PRYOR

The theologies of Paul Tillich and Karl Rahner offer points of great coherence, but remain fundamentally distinct in certain regards. I believe that many of these differences are the result of minor, though significant, methodological discrepancies between these thinkers. By acknowledging and examining these distinctive facets, we are given a glimpse into their respective areas of theological concern. Thus, the paper will begin by analyzing Tillich and Rahner’s respective methodologies and thereafter offer a brief comparison. The methodological consequences will then be considered through an analysis of their respective conceptions of the symbol.

By examining this particular theological construction, semiotics, the ramifications of their inherent methodological differences, especially in identifying appropriate theological source material, can be demonstrated.

### Tillich on Method

Understanding Tillich’s theological method requires an understanding of his “method of correlation” and the “theological circle.” The “method of correlation” is the core component. Succinctly, the method asserts that the Christian faith is explained through the mutual interdependence of existential questions and theological answers. He believes this is the method that systematic theology has always used, either explicitly or implicitly.<sup>1</sup>

Langdon Gilkey, in describing the method of correlation, emphasizes the mutual interdependence of Tillich’s method. Such an emphasis evades the tinge of condescension that a cursory reading of Tillich’s method seems to imply (“Of course a theo-

<sup>46</sup> Performances “have ... been articulating a new image of the artist. One might even go as far as to say that these performances have propagated a new image of human and society” Fischer-Lichte 2008: 164.

gian would say all existential questions have *theological* answers!”). Gilkey reminds us that without the existential questions the reflective function of religion would be inoperable. These questions arise as a part of the human being’s “creative self-interpretation in all realms of culture.”<sup>2</sup> Philosophy is a particularly apt tool for contributing to this interpretive process,<sup>3</sup> but many other cultural disciplines also inform these questions. Without existential questions, theological answers will become “esoteric, meaningless, and, in the end, heteronomous.”<sup>4</sup>

Conversely, the creative self-interpretation that forms existential questions relies upon reason and the analysis of the human situation. In this analysis, we discover a pervasive finitude in all of experienced reality. However, “Reason in both its objective and its subjective structures points to something which appears in these structures but which transcends them in power and meaning.”<sup>5</sup> This is what Tillich calls the “depth of reason.” This depth that appears in rational structure, directs our creative self-interpretation beyond itself. The depth of reason present in every rational construction points to an infinite ground beyond pervasive finitude. This ground precedes reason; it is a revelation that reason points toward and which is given in religion and its reflection on its symbols.<sup>6</sup>

The analogy constructed by Veit Brügmann between the method of correlation and a passage from Tillich’s sermon “Seeing and Hearing” helps illustrate this interdependence. Tillich emphasizes the power of seeing as a creative, transformational function in this sermon. “Only the human eye is able to see in this way, to see a world in every small thing and to see a universe *of* all things. Therefore the human eye is infinite in reach and irresistible in power. It is the correlate to the light of creation.”<sup>7</sup> Brügmann sees, in the relationship between the eye and light, a correlation to the existential question and theological answer of Tillich’s methodology.

Wie also das Auge auf das Licht hin geschaffen wurde, so harret die menschliche Frage der götli-

chen Antwort. Nicht, daß die Antwort aus der Frage abgeleitet würde, nicht, daß das Göttliche das Produkt der menschlichen Sehnsucht wäre. Wie das Licht von außen, von jenseits des Auges in dasselbe hineinfällt, kommt auch die göttliche Antwort von jenseits des Menschlichen. Doch ist von vornherein die Frage auf die Antwort von jenseits des Menschlichen.... Zugleich aber gibt dieses Gleichnis auch her, zu verdeutlichen, daß die theologische Antwort von der existentiellen Frage ihre Gestalt bekommt.<sup>8</sup>

This interdependence between existential question and theological answer structures Tillich's whole theological system. This is not surprising, given Tillich's understanding of the similitude between method and system. "Method and system determine each other."<sup>9</sup> The method employed is itself an aspect of the reality it tries to describe. The underlying structure of Tillich's systematic work, being divided into one section analyzing human existence and one in which a theological answer is given, is a necessary requisite of the method of correlation.<sup>10</sup>

Tillich is careful to show that the theologian who is formulating theological answers must make a philosophical analysis of the existential questions. Since the questions come from our "creative self-interpretation," the theologian—as a participant in the culture—is capable of formulating the existential questions to which theology must respond. Still, Tillich recognizes that there is something unique about the situation of the theologian raising existential questions:

The difference between the philosopher who is not a theologian and the theologian who works as a philosopher in analyzing human existence is only that the former tries to give an analysis which will be part of a broader philosophical work, while the latter tries to correlate the material of his analysis with the theological concepts he derives from the Christian faith. This does not make the philosophical work of the theologian heteronomous. As a theologian he does not tell himself what is philosophically true. As a philosopher he does not tell himself what is theologically true. But he cannot help seeing human existence and existence generally in such a way that the Christian symbols appear meaningful and understandable to him.<sup>11</sup>

Tillich is describing the constant situation in which the theologian finds herself: the theological circle.

Tillich's theological circle is a specific form of a more general hermeneutical circle that penetrates his understanding of epistemology and the philosophical enterprise.<sup>12</sup> Fundamentally, all understanding is circular. Our ultimate concern, that concern to which all other concerns are subject, conditions the cognitive union of subject and object. In addition to subjecting all other concerns to itself, the ultimate concern also promises ultimate fulfillment. If the demands of the ultimate concern are not met, then one risks being excluded from the fulfillment that the ultimate concern promises.<sup>13</sup> Since the ultimate concern can (in principle) be anything, the ultimate concern that conditions cognitive union is not necessarily theological.<sup>14</sup> Hence, I reassert, the theological circle is a specific formulation of this more general hermeneutical circle. The unique aspect of the theological circle is that the ultimate concern that conditions cognitive union in this circle necessarily provides the fulfillment promised by its ultimate concern.

Now, we can further state that all specifically theological understanding is also circular. It relies upon a *revelation* that, though sensed as the depth of reason in rational formulation, is always *given*. Even for the philosopher of religion who might try to abstract the nature of this fundamental principle from rational formulation itself, for the principle to be present ubiquitously it must precede or ground all formulations: it must be a given upon which we can rely.<sup>15</sup> Further, this revelation—for it to be a truly *theological* circle—should be the ultimate concern of the theologian.

To be ultimately concerned is an act of faith that requires the whole personality of the individual. Thus, faith is an ecstatic state in which we are grasped by the ultimate concern that in turn drives us beyond ourselves and transcends our finite rationality.<sup>16</sup> "Ecstasy unites the experience of the abyss to which reason in all its functions is driven with the experience of the ground in which reason is grasped by the mystery of its own depth and of the depth of being generally."<sup>17</sup> Reason is grasped by an ultimate concern in an event of revelation that is not contrary to reason, but elevates reason beyond its finitude opening a new dimension of knowledge.<sup>18</sup>

One consequence of the theological circle is that anyone "can be a theologian as long as he acknowledges the content of the theological circle as his ultimate concern."<sup>19</sup> Also of import is the unique situation of the Christian theologian in the theological circle. She claims the fundamental principle of her



ultimate concern is the concrete Christian message. This concrete commitment narrows the scope of the Christian theologian's theological circle, since it is not a general principle but a particular set of concrete events that form the ultimate concern to which the Christian theologian always returns.<sup>20</sup>

### Rahner on Method

In working on Rahner's concept of theological method, we must first note that method is not central to his work. He is not developing throughout his lifetime an increasingly rarefied method that is applicable regardless of its context. Moreover, his broader theological work is not concerned with creating a ramified systematic theology. Instead we ought to follow the suggestion of Francis Schüssler Fiorenza: "One should read Rahner primarily as a practical theologian. He adopts as well as adapts his method to concrete theological and pastoral issues."<sup>21</sup>

We should not think this means Rahner lacks an identifiable method altogether. This would certainly be untrue, but the method itself is dynamic. The problem Rahner is addressing, the contextual horizon of which such a problem is a part, and the time in his career when he is writing all affect the way we ought to describe Rahner's method. Hence, I would be derelict not to note that my analysis of Rahner's methodology focuses almost entirely on its later development in *Foundations of Christian Faith* and various essays from *Theological Investigations*. While his earlier work in philosophy of religion is important, it will not be my focus here.<sup>22</sup>

The classical (sometimes totalizing) description of Rahner's method is as "transcendental." While the transcendental is an important aspect of Rahner's method, we must, at the outset, be sure to realize it is only one of many parts.<sup>23</sup> Further, if a theological method is a tool for thinking that can be applied, in principle, to any number of various theological phenomena regardless of their particularity, then it is, perhaps, best not even to call transcendental inquiry a part of Rahner's method proper. Rather, we should think of it as a description of an epistemological structure that conditions the way he thinks theology can be pursued.<sup>24</sup>

Regardless of whether we parse out the transcendental as part of his methodology proper or as preparatory to it, Rahner's use of the term should not be confused with Kant's definition of it. Rahner, along with most theologians and philosophers since

Kant, describes his investigation as transcendental since it is an investigation that attempts to account for the conditions that make possible, or make knowledge possible of, an object of inquiry. For Kant, this analysis of the transcendental was entirely distinct from the realm of the transcendent: the transcendent was beyond experience while the transcendental referred to the conditions of experience. As will be demonstrated later, this is certainly not the case for Rahner.

Nor should we think that his transcendental theology is the application of a broadly transcendental philosophy to theological subjects.<sup>25</sup> Rahner uses the idea of the transcendental in a "pre-philosophical" sense. By principle any type of inquiry could be transcendental if it takes as its topic of consideration the "mutual inter-conditioning process" that occurs between a knowing subject and a known object. This mutual conditioning operates like a hermeneutical circle. The transcendental capacity of the individual that makes knowledge possible is a constitutive part of the knowledge of an object. It is the constitutive part not only of knowledge of the object's "nature" but also its "historical condition." The penetration of the transcendental subjectivity into the knowledge of the object at both levels prevents a bifurcation of essential, metaphysical knowledge from strictly empirical knowledge.<sup>26</sup> In turn, the transcendence of the knowing subject never occurs as an object of independent consideration: some concrete, historical object is required for the transcendental capacity of the individual to manifest.<sup>27</sup> Insofar as he highlights the reciprocal conditioning of historicity and metaphysical essence, we can characterize Rahner's method as transcendental.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, when theology is pursued via transcendental inquiry, anthropology becomes fundamental, since the transcendental capacity of the subject herself is constitutive of the knowledge of an object. The *a priori* transcendental capacity of the human being that makes knowledge possible is what Rahner calls the fundamental experience of the self. This experience (as mentioned above) can only occur in correlation to other things, so "man experiences himself as being at the disposal of other things, a disposal over which he has no control... His transcendental is rather a relationship that does not establish itself by its own power, but is experienced as something which was established by and is at the disposal of another, and which is grounded in the abyss of ineffable mystery."<sup>29</sup> Implied by this orientation toward mystery and non-controlled disposal is

a non-thematic experience of God.<sup>30</sup> This experience of God is a non-thematic, transcendental, constitutive element of the experience of the self. Vice versa, the experience of the self as “something distinct from his own act and as the subject of that act” makes possible the experience of God.<sup>31</sup> Thus, there is no contradiction when Rahner insists that the “principle of a transcendental theology is genuinely theological” and that “its subject-matter is the perfect totality of man.”<sup>32</sup>

One of Rahner’s own examples is helpful in understanding this point:

The concrete beloved person who is the object of my love and in whom it is realized (and without whom it does not exist) cannot be deduced *a priori* from human possibilities, but is rather a historical occurrence, an indissoluble fact which has to be accepted. But in spite of this, such love for this concrete person can only be understood when one comprehends man as the being who must of necessity fulfill himself in love in order to be true to his nature. Even the most unpredictable, concrete love, occurring in history, must therefore be understood transcendently in this way, in order that it may be what it should be.<sup>33</sup>

The abstract conception of the human being requires a historical subject for transcendental inquiry. Hence, our concrete experiences, i.e., the locative experiences of ourselves that characterize our finite horizon of experience, are, insofar as we are transcendental subjects, experiences of God.<sup>34</sup>

While I do not want to detract from the importance and innovation of the idea of the transcendental in Rahner’s theology and methodology, it is the emphasis on practical theology as a methodological element that I find strikingly unique. By Rahner’s assessment, pluralism in contemporary theology has reached a critical mass that cannot be overcome.<sup>35</sup> No single person can amass the amount of information and expertise needed to formulate a scientific foundation and basic explication of the Christian faith.<sup>36</sup> In response to this crisis, Rahner proposes a distinct first level of reflection in theology that is different from the scientific level of reflection.

What is most interesting on this account is that in abandoning the neo-scholastic project of formulating a scientific basis for the faith, Rahner simultaneously absolves himself of any theologically foundational reason for pursuing his transcendental theology along specifically systematic lines. In fact, he clearly does not engage topics in a systematic fashion.

Instead, he allows praxis and practical theology to guide his theological investigation and shape his methodology. Practical theology and its contemporary ecclesiastic concerns becomes the “critical conscience” of his transcendental theology. It is this component of transcendental theology’s method that gives voice to what problems are of greatest theological concern.<sup>37</sup>

### Comparing Tillich and Rahner on Method

We cannot help but notice the similarity between Tillich’s method of correlation and Rahner’s emphasis on the transcendental. In both cases, these concepts provide a way to correlate philosophy with theology and a hermeneutical awareness for theological formulation. Despite these important points of methodological similarity, distinctions in their respective *applications* of methodology elicit vast differences in the structure of their theological output.

Tillich’s systematic theology employs its methodology as a formal tool of reasoning. It is a structure for investigating reality and elucidating the fundamental unity of being that pervades all of life by Tillich’s assessment.<sup>38</sup> This fundamental unity allows Tillich to employ his method of correlation across a vast range of various problems, both abstract and concrete.<sup>39</sup> The method of correlation is the *Urbild* for theological formulation.

In Rahner, the case is quite different. His emphasis on the transcendental is functionally and consequentially quite similar to Tillich’s method of correlation. However, the transcendental in Rahner functions in conjunction with a strong concern for practical theology that yields his indirect method. The transcendental and practical dimensions in Rahner’s work form a meta-methodology that engages the transcendental subject’s context as a *normative source* for theological construction; the context is not just the social element that conditions the language of theological response to otherwise philosophical problems.<sup>40</sup> Rahner’s methodology emphasizes the power of the particular and opens the door for more radical contextual theology. Comparatively, we might think of Tillich’s methodology as the culmination of the systematic mentality and Rahner’s methodology as the roots of contextual theological emphasis.

## Tillich on Symbol

Tillich's use of the symbolic is, as Lewis Ford perhaps correctly assesses, a part of a "meta-theological" issue that is reshaped repeatedly throughout the *Systematic Theology*. The importance of the symbolic for Tillich's theology is its use in describing God. Literal language is an inappropriate mode of discourse for such a description.<sup>41</sup> Despite the centrality of symbolic structures in Tillich's theology, there is little agreement amongst commentators about how to properly understand and describe Tillich's semiotic theory. Ford identifies three "alternative and competing theories": the dialectic of affirmation and negation, the metaphor of transparency, and a theory of participation.<sup>42</sup> Donald Dreisbach agrees with Ford's analysis, but sees these three theories not as competing, but as synthetic elements contributing to a single semiotic doctrine.<sup>43</sup> Even more fundamentally, there is little agreement amongst commentators about how to define the term symbol in Tillich's theology. Ford privileges the depth metaphor of reason and the initial description of the *Systematic Theology*,<sup>44</sup> Dreisbach relies heavily on the six descriptive points from *Dynamics of Faith*,<sup>45</sup> while Russell Aldwinckle primarily offers a descriptive definition of symbol that is heavily connected with Tillich's doctrine of revelation.<sup>46</sup> Given this plurality of interpretations and disagreement amongst interpreters, is it truly possible to give a coherent and singular account of Tillich's semiotic theory?

I believe we can. A key source in this endeavor is Tillich's response to Ford's work, "The three strands of Tillich's theory of religious symbols."<sup>47</sup> Tillich, overall, agrees with Ford's analysis, and in response to Ford's criticism offers some clarifying insights. Where these insights are taken up at greater length in other analyses, we can reconnoiter a rich and coherent account of Tillich's semiotic theory. Thus, my analysis will be organized around Tillich's response to Ford and Ford's work itself.<sup>48</sup>

Tillich agrees with Ford's description of three theories and with the primacy he places on the first of these theories—the dialectic of affirmation and negation. The secondary and tertiary theories are auxiliaries that enhance the affirmation-negation dialectic.<sup>49</sup> Ford's treatment of the dialectic is quite amiable, though an astringent criticism accompanies his analysis of transparency and participation (the secondary and tertiary theories). Tillich's response to these critiques helps us see how these auxiliary

theories are deeply connected to the primary dialectic of affirmation and negation.

Ford's critique of Tillich's use of transparency in describing symbols is centered on the passivity of the concept. Ford identifies three features of the transparency metaphor for symbols: lack of existential distortion, negation of finitude, and affinity for what is symbolized. The conjunction of these characteristics into a single, passive structural theory of symbols is untenable since the characteristics identified are mutually contradictory. Ford argues that the transparency of a symbol entails the loss of its existential reality.<sup>50</sup>

In response to Ford, Tillich asserts that "transparency" ought to be replaced with "translucency," since transparency, in English, implies the very kind of passivity Ford senses.<sup>51</sup> The translucent symbol is like a stained glass that affects the light passing through it. The color of the glass makes visible the light that would otherwise be invisible; the translucent symbol manifests the infinite through its existential distortion.<sup>52</sup>

This clarification fits well with descriptions of religious symbols found in the *Systematic Theology*: "They [religious symbols] are directed toward the infinite which they symbolize *and* toward the finite through which they symbolize it."<sup>53</sup> The existential reality of the symbol becomes an integral part of its symbolic capacity. The translucency model of symbols is also coherent with the dialectic of affirmation and negation that Ford describes. Just as the epistemological aspects of a religious symbol that affirm or negate the infinite cannot be parsed apart,<sup>54</sup> so too a translucent symbol requires its finite, existential embodiment to manifest the infinite through itself.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, Ford addresses the participatory element of the symbol in Tillich's theology. He views this participation as an extension of Tillich's characterization in his earlier work of a symbol's "innate power." The innate power is expressed by "connotative suggestiveness" and "intrinsic similarity." Thus, Ford identifies five ways in which Tillich uses symbolic participation, and, not surprisingly, the two most useful of which correlate to and expand upon the concepts of "connotative suggestiveness" and "intrinsic similarity" that he identifies in Tillich's earlier writings on innate symbolic power.<sup>56</sup>

Tillich, in response, emphasizes the innate power of the symbol is its power to "radiate being and meaning."<sup>57</sup> His use of the term "participation" emphasizes that the radiating power of the symbol draws upon the power of being implicit in what is

symbolized by the symbol. Given the proclivity of Ford to interpret Tillich's work passively, his interpretation of participation in Tillich's work is abstract and Neo-Platonic.

Instead, we might emphasize the hermeneutical awareness that Tillich's concept of participation invokes. The symbol participates in that to which it points by becoming a concrete placeholder for the symbolized, emanating its power. It is a symbol and not a sign, because the symbol is not arbitrarily assigned as placeholder; by some cultural-historical mechanism, it has become the necessary construct for what it symbolizes.<sup>58</sup> In his often-used example of the flag of a nation, the flag is symbolic because it participates in the majesty of the group it represents.<sup>59</sup> This participation occurs because, in contemplating the symbol, it is actually the symbolized that is being considered. "Sie besagt, daß der innere Akt, der sich auf das Symbol richtet, nicht das Symbol meint, sondern das in ihm Symbolisierte."<sup>60</sup> Thus, we might follow interpreters like Richard Grigg and find the power of symbol in Tillich's theology to be the symbol's ability to empower us. The symbol provides the concrete locality for the symbolic awareness of being-itself. The symbol is the negation of the negation of being. It is an *Aufhebung* that empowers the individual to transcend her existence by manifesting the symbolized in her contemplation of the symbol itself.<sup>61</sup> Thus interpreted, participation is like translucency: an auxiliary concept that augments the overall symbolic framework's dialectic of affirmation and negation.

Dreisbach is immensely helpful in relating Tillich's method to the symbolic. Following closely to Tillich's own assessment, Dreisbach believes that the function of theology in Tillich's system is the analysis and interpretation of symbols. This analysis is not the deconstruction of symbols into less symbolic or non-symbolic structures, contra William Rowe.<sup>62</sup> Nonetheless, Tillich's understanding of the symbolic seems to result in an interpretive contradiction: in order to analyze and interpret a symbol we must have objective knowledge to direct this interpretation, but possessing objective knowledge would seem to make symbols theological adiafpora.<sup>63</sup>

In order to move Tillich's understanding of symbol out of this potential pitfall, Dreisbach emphasizes that Tillich's conception of God as "being-itself" is ultimately a non-symbolic assertion that grounds theological interpretation of all otherwise symbolic religious phenomena. He argues that this fundamental assertion cannot really be symbolic

since it lacks a concrete referent. Instead, it is an indicator of a cognizance burgeoning forth from our own sense of being.<sup>64</sup> Since philosophy deals with the "structure of being," an expression of the form our experience of reality takes that guides our interpretation of symbols, Tillich's concept of symbol is intimately tied to his broader methodological framework. Dreisbach draws out this connection quite clearly, thereby demonstrating how the cogency of Tillich's conception of symbol relies heavily upon his method.

To summarize what I take to be the most coherent account of Tillich's position, although he himself is not always consistent with it, all men have an awareness of being-itself, although conceptual knowledge of the nature of being is impossible. Being-itself is manifested in religious symbols. Philosophical analysis produces conceptual knowledge of the structure of being, although not of being itself. The theologian makes use of this conceptual knowledge in the interpretation of religious symbols. Interpretation is not translation and so does not require knowledge of the nature of being itself, but it is guided by knowledge of the structure of being.<sup>65</sup>

It is quite clear how Tillich's semiotic theory is deeply intertwined with his method. The correlation between philosophical questions and theological answers takes the form of a conceptual knowledge of the structure of being (framework of a philosophical question) and its bearing on interpretation of religious symbols that reveal our awareness of being-itself (a theological answer shaped by the structure and source of its foundational depth). The *Urbild* of Tillich's method here is traced onto a particular structure of systematic theological thinking. His understanding of the symbolic serves as a particular instantiation of his pervasive methodological concern.

### Rahner on Symbol

Discussing Rahner's use and understanding of symbolism is, somewhat, clearer than trying to address his meta-methodology. Rahner, much like Tillich, draws a distinction between genuine symbols, "constitutive symbols," and arbitrary signs, "representative symbols."<sup>66</sup> The grounds for the distinction are quite different, however. In Tillich, a sign is distinguished from a symbol in that it does not participate in the thing to which it points.<sup>67</sup> For Rahner, the boundary between constitutive symbols and representative symbols is more porous. The symbol is

identified by an agreed point of contact that exists between two realities. However, if one pursues an analysis of the symbolic in this way, constitutive and representative symbols collapse into one another since implicitly “everything agrees in some way or another with everything else.”<sup>68</sup> The distinctive character of a constitutive symbol is “the self-realization of a being in the other, which is constitutive of its essence.”<sup>69</sup> It is the final clause that is essential to understand. A constitutive symbol is distinguished from a representative symbol by the “intrinsicity” of the relationship between the two realities, “whether or not the symbol is the expression of the other being, for that being’s self-realization.”<sup>70</sup>

In investigating constitutive symbols in more detail, we can begin by noting that, according to Rahner, all beings are symbolic “because they necessarily ‘express’ themselves in order to attain their own nature.”<sup>71</sup> The key word is “express.” It implies what Rahner later makes explicit: all beings are “multiple.” He claims this is a consequence (theologically) of the plurality in unity of the Trinity.<sup>72</sup> What exactly is this multiplicity of a being?

The multiplicity of a being is the symbolic reflection of Rahner’s concern for the transcendental in his method. Just as the transcendental capacity of the individual was a constitutive part of the object she considers, and as such knowledge of the object implicitly relates to experience of the self, so too the symbol expresses itself and thereby “gives itself away from itself into the ‘other’, and there finds itself in knowledge and love....”<sup>73</sup> Thus every being that realizes its being in expression is symbolic. Vice versa, every being in which another being expresses itself, that is, in which the other being gives itself into a being, is also necessarily capable of the symbolic. As Rahner says:

A being can be and is known, in so far as it is itself ontically (in itself) symbolic because it is ontologically (for itself) symbolic. What then is the primordial meaning of symbol and symbolic, according to which each being is in itself and for itself symbolic, and hence (and to this extent) symbolic for another? It is this: as a being realizes itself in its own intrinsic ‘otherness’ (which is constitutive of its being), retentive of its intrinsic plurality (which is contained in its self-realization) as its derivative and hence congruous expression, it makes itself known. This derivative and congruous expression, constitutive of each being, is the symbol which comes in addition from the object of knowledge to the

knower—in addition only, because already initially present in the depths of the grounds of each one’s being. The being is known in this symbol, without which it cannot be known at all: thus it is symbol in the original (transcendental) sense of the word.<sup>74</sup>

This multiplicity of being can be conceptualized in two distinct, though related, levels. First, there is the unity of the infinite horizon. Against it, the multiplicity of finite beings is made comprehensible and actualizes the unified horizon of being itself. The infinite horizon is more than the multiplicity of finite beings, but it is glimpsed in each of these limited beings. The finite being is the mediated immediacy of God. “In short, God is the source and ground of all finite beings, all of which are distinct from God and yet expressions of God, and all of which—though distinct—are united in God.”<sup>75</sup> Finite beings are symbols of God.<sup>76</sup>

The second level is parallel to what has been described above. Instead of considering the multiplicity of finite beings against the unified infinite horizon, Rahner analogously discusses the plurality of parts of the body against the originating principle of the soul. The soul gains its expression in the body of an individual. The individual parts of the body, in separate consideration, glimpse the “prior ontological unity” of the soul—the whole person. The body is the ground of all its individual parts. These individual parts are distinct from the body; still they symbolically manifest the entire body through the prior ontological unity of the soul that animates the body. Parts are symbolic of the whole of which they are a part.<sup>77</sup>

In considering Rahner’s conception of symbolism, we gain an operational view of Rahner’s application of meta-methodological themes in forming a specific theological method that is particularly apt in defining its object of consideration. The transcendental elements are clearly visible in Rahner’s understanding of symbolism. However, in the specificity of their practical theological application, the transcendental elements take on a level of methodological specificity not reached by their consideration in abstraction.<sup>78</sup> Thus, we can say it is in dealing with the practical theological questions that result from devotion to the symbol of the heart of Jesus that prompts Rahner’s concern with the parallel coherence of intra and inter-multiplicity of being. The resultant symbolic transcendental method makes particular the abstract transcendental structures that provide the framework to theological investigation.

### Comparing Tillich and Rahner on Symbol

In trying to compare Tillich and Rahner's respective conceptions of symbolism, I have found it helpful to interject terminology from Charles Sanders Peirce's and Ernst Cassirer's semiotic theories. Part of the difficulty in comparing Tillich and Rahner is that their underlying reliance on a German philosophical worldview makes for an intuitive correspondence. Translating their semiotic terminology into a common analytical framework—or in the case of Cassirer a framework that helps bridge the gap between analytical and idealistic philosophy—helps identify specific commonality and difference in their understandings beyond the mutually intelligible philosophical-cultural framework they each employ. This allows for a generalized comparison of the differing problem-spaces that Tillich's and Rahner's symbolisms, and more broadly their methods, address.

Rahner's symbolic theory is quite similar to Cassirer's expressive function of the symbol: *Ausdrucksfunktion*.<sup>79</sup> The way in which Rahner's theology of symbols collapses various levels at which the multiplicity of being occurs, inculcates elements of the transcendental reality into actuality, and ensures that symbols as parts are expressive of the whole of which they are a part, all correlates to Cassirer's description. Because a part is expressive of the whole, any particular symbol is (potentially) sufficient for description of the whole of which it is a part. Still, as Rahner's analysis of parts in the body demonstrates, the particular symbolic part, in its particularity brings to the fore certain characteristics of that which it symbolizes more than others (i.e., the sacred heart of Jesus is expressive of all of Jesus, but particularly his love). Thus, Rahner's symbolic theory, in its reliance on his notion of the transcendental and how that develops into the specific method by which he analyzes the symbolic, draws attention not to the significance of a particular symbol and its relation to the object it symbolizes, but to the cumulative function of the whole network of symbols that are the multiplicity of the unified object they symbolize.

Tillich's symbolic theory can be characterized more directly in accord with the intermediate development of Peirce's semiotics<sup>80</sup> in that both emphasize the primacy of the "sign-vehicle," the thing that does the symbolizing. The structure of the existential situation of the symbol limits its symbolic capacity in opening new levels of meaning. While Tillich's

construction of the nuances of sign-vehicles is immense, his conception of their application to an object is relatively unilateral. His symbolic theory (in Peirce's terms) is primarily concerned with an indexical correlation of object to sign-vehicle. The symbolic interrelation of various sign-vehicle tokens for a single object is less of a concern. For instance, Tillich's symbol theory formulates three distinct types of objective religious symbols, but the correlation between these types and the influences that one type has upon the other types is not an integral part of how he constructs his understanding of the three types. I believe this is a consequence of Tillich's *Urbild* application of his method. In patterning the application of his method to distinct, disparate problem sets, an in-depth analysis is provided of the particular object of consideration, but the place of the object in relation to other objects of consideration is, perhaps inadvertently, deemphasized.

Tillich and Rahner's symbolic theories are similar conceptions with radically different emphases and different conceptions of what problem is at stake in constructing a theory of symbols. In terms of the language of Peirce, Rahner's symbolism is overtly concerned with the symbolic to the exclusion of the iconic or indexical elements of the object, while remaining mute on the various and detailed distinctions Peirce constructs for working with sign-vehicles. The implicit presence of the whole thing being symbolized in the symbol itself, and Rahner's firm assertion that *all being is symbolic*, sets up the question of the symbol in such a way that fine-grain distinctions between symbols is not really a problem that needs to be addressed. Since the practical starting question (in the essay considered in depth here) concerns the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Rahner's focus present in the parts is clearly germane. Lastly, the flexibility of Rahner's method, existing as a skeletal framework in the abstract that allows a practical concern to dictate the detail of its own transcendental expression, is demonstrated particularly clearly in addressing the issue of symbolism.

Tillich's opposition to Cassirer, while explicitly it is concerned with the *Bedeutungsfunktion* of symbol as it supplants the affective function,<sup>81</sup> is perhaps rooted in a more fundamental disagreement. At the level of *Ausdrucksfunktion*, Cassirer claims a coalescence of experiential appearance and reality. He develops his symbolic analysis out of this fundamental state. Tillich's symbolic theory starts with a radical, non-symbolic distinction: God is being-itself and the correlate is that we are finite beings. If there is a

fundamental unity regarding Tillich's theology, it is the tension of this distinction.

Thus, In Rahner we have a semiotic theory that concerns itself with a network of symbols and their mutual interrelation as a means of expressing the whole object implicit within each symbol. It is not concerned with strongly distinguishing the precise set of mechanisms by which the symbolized is manifested by different types of symbols. In Tillich, the semiotic theory is constructed around concern for particularity of the symbolizing object and the challenges of an existent symbol mediating its object that is not implicit to itself.<sup>82</sup> Exploring the interdependence and interrelation of a network of such symbols methodologically cannot be the focus of his symbolic theory; such exploration better describes the task of theology in relation to its religious suppositions.<sup>83</sup>

These slight differences in semiotics reflect the nuanced differences in methodology that we examined previously. In both semiotics and methodology, Tillich and Rahner are examining the process and potential of the conditioning of subject-object relations given their hermeneutical awareness. The difference is in how they emphasize the mechanics of the conditioning: Tillich emphasizes the dialectical tension of disparateness, while Rahner emphasizes transcendental unity. *This fundamental difference in supposition yields methodological distinction that results in semiotic theories that mirror these emphases*: Tillich's symbols are keys to deepening the tension of the dialectic of being and non-being that theology explores and articulates; Rahner's symbols are transcendental manifestations that make practical, existential locutions the liminal sources of theology.

### **Contemporary Consideration of Tillich's Theology**

This comparative analysis yields two notable contributions for present-day study of Tillich's theology. First, the semiotic comparison of Rahner and Tillich provides an interesting point of departure as an analytical criterion that could be an effective pedagogical instrument in teaching 20<sup>th</sup> century theology: their respective semiotics can be used to illustrate the nebulous divide between "modern" and "postmodern" theological methodology. This pedagogical potential is enhanced when the semiotic theories are compared to an outside analytic of this divide. The three axes of modernism identified by

Nancey Murphy and James McClendon serve this purpose well.

In their article, *Distinguishing Modern and Postmodern Theologies*, Murphy and McClendon identify three axes of modernism that elucidate the modern/postmodern distinction: representationalism and expressivism; skepticism and foundationalism; and individualism and collectivism. Postmodern theologies depart from the binary structure of the axes; modern theologies tend to fall to one end of the axes.<sup>84</sup> Since there is more than a single axis identifying the modern/postmodern divide in their analysis, Murphy and McClendon better allow us to contend with theologies, like that of Tillich, which may depart from one axis while remaining characterizable in terms of another axis. One hopes that it is quite clear at this point that it is the axis of skepticism and foundationalism that serves as an exemplary comparative analytic for my account of Tillich's and Rahner's semiotic theories.

The second contribution takes the form of a live question to Tillich scholars today: how does Tillich's work remain relevant as it engages present-day cultural contexts that are saturated by pluralism and a "linguistic turn?" The cultural questions of Tillich's time are no longer necessarily the questions of the present. Do the current contexts call for a more radical hermeneutic than Tillich's *Systematic Theology* provide? Ultimately, I would argue that it does; nonetheless, Tillich's concept of symbol need not be as constrained as it is in his original presentation. The work of Richard Grigg as a post-theistic interpretation of Tillich is instructive at this point.

Grigg offers a phenomenological analysis of "empowerment" as means to interpreting Tillich's work in the *Systematic Theology*. Empowerment, according to Grigg, provides a three-part dialectic—an identity-goal, resistance to that goal in the form of an interior barrier, and the overcoming of that resistance—that can be interpreted as providing an experiential basis for Tillich's concept of being-itself. Grigg finds this means of interpretation helpful for expanding the philosophical horizons of Tillich's work beyond German idealism and for expanding the theological possibilities beyond the traditional Christian symbol set (i.e., using Tillich's semiotics as a way to develop a theology of religions).<sup>85</sup>

While we may or may not agree with the direction of Grigg's work, he does represent one effort that strives to untether Tillich's semiotics from its foundationalist epistemology, thereby allowing his

semiotic theory to engage current cultural and philosophical concerns. Such a reading reaches beyond the scope of the semiotic or methodological formulations found in his *Systematic Theology*. However, it is a testament to the great success of that work that Tillich's theology might yield itself to such metamorphosis in the light of an evolving plurality of cultural questions.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 60. Henceforth referred to as *ST I*.

<sup>2</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, 63.

<sup>3</sup> The aptness of philosophy lies in the way it structures the holistic questions of existence. The philosopher's driving existential force canalizes into her theorizing about cognitive function. "His existence is involved in his question; therefore, he asks the question of ultimate reality—the question of being-itself. On the other hand, the existential element does not swallow the theoretical. *In contrast to the saint, prophet, and poet, the philosopher's passion for the infinite pour into his cognitive function* [emphasis mine]. He wants to *know*; he wants to know what being means, what its structures are, and how one can penetrate into its mystery. He is a philosopher." Paul Tillich, *Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality*, Richard lectures 1951-1952 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955) 19-20. Henceforth referred to as *BR*.

We must also keep in mind that Tillich's use of philosophy is not as mere *techné*. Philosophy asks the question of being as knowing: we are all philosophers. "Philosophy in this sense is not a matter of liking or disliking. It is a matter of man as man, for man is that being who asks the question of being. Therefore, every human being philosophizes, just as every human being moralizes and

acts politically, artistically, scientifically, religiously. There are immense differences in degree, education, and creativity among different human beings in the exercise of these functions, but there is no difference in the character of the function itself... Man is by nature a philosopher, because he inescapably asks the question of being. He does it in myth and epic, in drama and poetry, in the structure and the vocabulary of any language." Tillich, *BR* 8-9.

<sup>4</sup> Langdon Brown Gilkey, *Gilkey on Tillich* (New York, N.Y.: Crossroad Pub. Co, 1990), 71. Heteronomous is being used here and elsewhere in the sense of "dogmatic." Tillich's theological answers when "unhitched" from philosophical questions become invasive laws, disconnected from a vitally informing context.

<sup>5</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, 79.

<sup>6</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, 81. See also Gilkey, *Gilkey on Tillich*, 71. I believe understanding this point is absolutely essential to grasping Tillich's methodology. The concept already appears in Tillich's earlier German writings (though the term metaphysics is used instead of ontology) resulting in what he calls "gläubiger Realismus." (Niebuhr translates it "belief-ful realism"). See Paul Tillich, *The Religious Situation*, trans. H. Richard Niebuhr, (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), 82-83. His description of three philosophical objections helps the reader understand how ontology is a fundamental question of all philosophy and not just certain types, found in Tillich, *BR*, 14-18. Finally, his description of the metaphor of depth is enlightening in relation to this discussion as well, as found in Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959) 7-8.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Tillich, "Seeing and Hearing," in *The New Being* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 128.

<sup>8</sup> Veit Brügmann, *Die Durchführung der Methode der Korrelation in den religiösen Reden Paul Tillichs* (Hamburg, 1969), 32. Brügmann's analogy also has the advantage of providing an analogical structure (seeing) that appears frequently throughout the history of theology, thereby providing us with an interesting means by which to compare Tillich's method with other theological work.

<sup>9</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, 60.

<sup>10</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, 66.

<sup>11</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, 63. See also Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 14-15. The discussion of the theological ellipse "described in terms of two central points—the existential question and the theological answer," was particularly helpful to me in visualizing the relationship between question and answer for the committed theologian. For an informative and well described application of the method of correlation to a particular context, see Anthony A. Ak-

inwale, O.P., "The Method of Correlation and African Theologians," in *Paul Tillich: A New Catholic assessment*, ed. Raymond F. Bulman and Frederick J. Parrella (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> See Richard Grigg, *Symbol and Empowerment: Paul Tillich's Post-theistic System* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1985), 56-63. His analytical distinction between the implicit hermeneutical correlation and the explicit apologetic correlation is particularly helpful in identifying the various and intertwined ways that Tillich's method can be employed. The apologetic correlation points to the explicit function of the method of correlation to juxtapose Christian symbols to cultural questions; thereby, the apologetic concern of the Christian witness is fulfilled in making Christian symbols *relevant*. Grigg's concept of the hermeneutical correlation is a precipitate of the apologetic correlation. "With this method [hermeneutical correlation] the philosophical questions and religious symbols are juxtaposed not as the expression of a cultural situation over against the Christian message, but as the expression of the structure of being over against being-itself as the depth of that structure." Grigg, *Symbol and Empowerment*, 55.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2001), 2. Henceforth referred to as *DF*. The key here is that the ultimate concern, an ontological structure, is implicit to epistemological formulations. It is in this light that I believe we can interpret Tillich's description of the relationship between reason and revelation to being and God: "In proceeding from the correlation of reason and revelation to that of being and God, we move to the more fundamental consideration; in traditional terms, we move from the epistemological to the ontological question." Also as it is clearly stated below on the same page, "Thought must start with being; it cannot go behind it..." Tillich, *ST I*, 163. See also Werner Schüssler and Erdmann Sturm, *Paul Tillich: Leben - Werk - Wirkung* (Darmstadt: WBG, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2007), 34-38. They do an excellent job of showing how Tillich employs the philosophical tradition and sees philosophy as a fundamentally ontological endeavor. See also Gilkey, *Gilkey on Tillich*, 27-29.

<sup>14</sup> For an example of nationalism as the ultimate concern see Tillich, *DF*, 3-4.

<sup>15</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, 9.

<sup>16</sup> Tillich, *DF*, 1, 7-8. See also Tillich, *ST I*, 111-112.

<sup>17</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, 113.

<sup>18</sup> Given Tillich's understanding of reason and revelation it becomes all the more clear why, as was stated earlier, the ontological question is a more fundamental concern in his theology than the epistemological (see note 10

and Grigg's analytical distinction as described in note 12). Tillich's description of the interaction between reason and revelation points to Grigg identifies as the hermeneutical correlation: a correlation that investigates (via theology) interaction between ontological structure (philosophical questions) and the depth of ontological meaning (religious symbols). The ontological objects of correlation empower the descriptive, epistemological investigation.

Further, given his understanding of revelation it is quite clear why scripture does not feature as prominently in Tillich's theology as compared to others, like Barth. The confusion he sees in the popular misuse of the term revelation (and the association of this misuse with scripture) leads Tillich to affirm revelation in ways that avoid or deemphasize the popular confusion. See Tillich, *DF*, 90. Brüggemann's analysis of Christ as the *Ursymbol* provides a good description of one way to think about revelation in Tillich's theology. See Brüggemann, *Die Durchführung der Methode der Korrelation*, 59-61.

<sup>19</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, 10.

<sup>20</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, 9-10.

<sup>21</sup> Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Method in Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 68.

<sup>22</sup> In such an interpretation I am particularly reliant upon Schüssler Fiorenza, "Method in Theology"; Karl Neumann, *Der Praxisbezug der Theologie bei Karl Rahner*, *Freiburger theologische Studien*, Bd. 118 (Freiburg: Herder, 1980); and Mary E. Hines, *The Transformation of Dogma: An Introduction to Karl Rahner on Doctrine* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989). The interpretive method in these works all stand contra the monolithic approach of a work like Thomas Sheehan, *Karl Rahner, the philosophical foundations* (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1987). If we take seriously Rahner's conception of the transcendental, then to identify an unchanging methodology with a static horizon of understanding from which all theological investigation proceeds would be impossible. The constantly evolving horizon of understanding for a given subject would result, at the very least, in small, incremental changes in theological methodology.

<sup>23</sup> Neumann, *Der Praxisbezug*, 58.

<sup>24</sup> This includes both the unconscious use of the transcendental in theology of the past and the call for conscious use of the transcendental in contemporary theology.

<sup>25</sup> See Neumann, *Der Praxisbezug*, 62.; Schüssler Fiorenza, "Method in Theology," 76-77.; & Otto Muck, "Heidegger und Karl Rahner," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 116, no. 3 (1994): 261-262. Muck's piece does

a nice job of illustrating the connection between transcendental method in Rahner and the hermeneutics involved in the phenomenological method of Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit* against the transcendental understanding of neo-Kantianism. Though, it is concerned with comparing only Rahner's work in *Hearer of the Word*.

<sup>26</sup> Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, trans. David Bourke, 23 vols, vol. 11 (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 87. Henceforth referred to as *TI* with vol. # .

<sup>27</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 2000) 34-35. Henceforth referred to as *FCF*. See also William V. Dych, "Theology in a New Key," in *A World of Grace: an introduction to the themes and foundations of Karl Rahner's theology*, ed. Leo J. O'Donovan (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1995), 5-6.

<sup>28</sup> Karl Rahner, "Transcendental Theology," in *Sacramentum Mundi; An Encyclopedia of Theology*, ed. Karl Rahner (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 288. This mutual interconditioning operates like Heidegger's notion of hermeneutical phenomenology. Rejecting the eidetic and transcendental reductions of Husserl, phenomenology—in Heidegger's *Being and Time*—becomes a description not of the distinction between appearance and reality with a strict separation of essence and existence, but a description of the world as such, that is as it is intelligible to us. This phenomenological description, which is an understanding of our *Being-in-the-world*, is hermeneutical insofar as it requires interpretation. Interpretation examines the intelligible, self-evident, conscious experience of existence (that is a preliminary phenomenological description) and elucidates the "fore-structures" of our understanding—uncovering what is hidden in understanding through interpretation. Bringing us back full circle, Heidegger reminds us, "Any interpretation which is to contribute to understanding, must already have understood what is to be interpreted." See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008), §32.

<sup>29</sup> Rahner, *FCF*, 42. See also 31-32.

<sup>30</sup> Rahner, *TI* 13, 123.

<sup>31</sup> Rahner, *TI* 13, 125. See also Rahner, *FCF*, 28-35. & Mary E. Hines, *The Transformation of Dogma*, 7-8. Rahner realizes that there is experiential knowledge of God that gives content and descriptive power to this fundamental experience of self. See Rahner, *FCF*, 51-68.

<sup>32</sup> Karl Rahner, "Transcendental Theology," 287. See also Rahner, *TI* 9, 28; Rahner, *TI* 17, 66; Schüssler

Fiorenza, "Method in theology," 69; Neumann, *Der Praxisbezug*, 176-180.

<sup>33</sup> Rahner, *TI* 9, 35.

<sup>34</sup> One of the challenges in writing on Rahner's methodology is that it is so intimately tied to understanding other aspects of his theology. For information on human understanding and the transcendental, see Rahner, *FCF*, 26-28 & 75-81; Anne E. Carr, "Starting with the Human," in O'Donovan, ed., 19-22. On the correlation of the experience of the self and the experience of God, see Rahner, *TI* 13, 129-132; Stephen J. Duffy, "Experience of Grace," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 43-49. Certainly the natural Christian corollary to this connection of experience in self and God is an understanding of Christology (as reflected by the immense scope of this topic in Rahner's work). Such an analysis is beyond the scope of this work. However, for a succinct summary of the principles of a transcendental Christology (which implicitly demonstrates how Christology shapes anthropology) see Rahner, *FCF*, 208-212.

<sup>35</sup> Rahner, *FCF*, 7.

<sup>36</sup> Rahner, *FCF*, 9.

<sup>37</sup> See Rahner, *TI* 9, 106ff.; Rahner, *TI* 11, 134-136.; See also, Schüssler Fiorenza, "Method in theology," 74-76 & 78-79. For a contemporary take on Rahner's concept of practical theology serving as a "critical conscience" see Robert L. Kinast, "How Pastoral Theology Functions," *Theology Today* 37, 4 (January 1981): 425-438.

<sup>38</sup> Gilkey, *Gilkey on Tillich*, 77-78.

<sup>39</sup> Certainly the *Systematic Theology* is a clear example of Tillich's more abstracted application of the method of correlation to philosophically formulated problems. We ought to consider Tillich's wartime addresses as examples of applying the method of correlation to very practical, cultural problems. See Paul Tillich, *Against the Third Reich: Paul Tillich's Wartime Addresses to Nazi Germany*, ed. Ronald H. Stone and Matthew Lon Weaver (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998). What is interesting is that whether the problem is ascertaining the relationship between revelation and reason or interpreting how responsibility is shared for the first and second world wars, the method of correlation is used to investigate the theological implications.

<sup>40</sup> See Rahner, *FCF*, 89. A ready place of comparison on this methodological point can be found in comparing Rahner's Christology as related to concerns of exegesis and dogmatics in the church and Christology as explicated in relation to the evolutionary world-view of contempo-

rary humanity. See Rahner, *TI* 11, 185-230. While Rahner provides the groundwork for uprooting typical systematic theological investigation in favor of a constructive and contextual theological methodology, it is a separate question as to how far we believe Rahner proceeds down this path in his actual constructive theological work.

<sup>41</sup> Lewis S. Ford, "The Three Strands of Tillich's Theory of Religious Symbols," *Journal of Religion* 46, no. 1 (1966): 104.

<sup>42</sup> Ford, "The Three Strands," 106.

<sup>43</sup> Donald F. Dreisbach, "Paul Tillich's Doctrine of Religious Symbols," *Encounter: Shane Quarterly* 37 (1976): 327.

<sup>44</sup> Ford, "The Three Strands," 106.

<sup>45</sup> Dreisbach, "Paul Tillich's Doctrine," 327.

<sup>46</sup> Russell Foster Aldwinckle, "Tillich's theory of religious symbolism.," *Canadian Journal of Theology* 10 (April 1964): 112.

<sup>47</sup> Paul Tillich, "Rejoinder," *Journal of Religion* 46, no. 1 (1966): 186-189.

<sup>48</sup> An interesting and alternative method, though beyond the scope of this work, for analyzing Tillich's semiotics might be more broadly comparative. Instead of focusing on commentators, focus on other scholars who have made interdisciplinary comparisons of Tillich's semiotics to semiotic theory in other disciplines; thereby one would highlight the unique aspects of Tillich's theory and problems of its interpretation. One might consider Leonard H. Ehrlich, "Tillich's 'symbol' vis-à-vis Jaspers' 'cipher'," *Harvard Theological Review* 66, no. 1 (January 1973): 153-156; Thomas Erne, "Formaufbau und Formzerstörung. Familienähnlichkeiten im Verhältnis von Kirche und Kunst," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 10, 1 (April 2006): 76-90; Aaron L. Mackler, "Symbols, reality, and God: Heschel's rejection of a Tillichian understanding of religious symbols.," *Judaism* 40, no. 3 (Summer 1991): 290-301, for such an analysis.

<sup>49</sup> Tillich, "Rejoinder," 186.

<sup>50</sup> Ford, "The Three Strands," 114-116. See especially 115 for an explanation of why Ford affirms the dialectic of negation and affirmation but rejects transparency.

<sup>51</sup> It may seem odd that Tillich in "Rejoinder" would appeal to an issue of translation and language at such a late point in his career. However, the appeal reminds us of the long lineage of symbolic consideration in Tillich's theology and the apparent continuity it has across shifts in his thinking. We ought to note the nearness between the four characteristics of symbols that Tillich has outlined as early as 1930 (*Uneigentlichkeit, Anschaulichkeit, Selbstmächtigkeit, and Anerkanntheit*—presently *Unerkanntheit*) in Paul Tillich, *Religiöse Verwirklichung*

(Berlin: Furche Verlag, 1930), 88-89. and the six characteristics outlined in Tillich, *DF*, 47-50. The rise and decline of symbols also appears in this early essay, see Tillich, *Religiöse Verwirklichung*, 106-109. Ford bases his use of transparency on analogy to Tillich's elaboration of the relationship between revelation and reason, see especially Tillich, *ST I*, 79-81. Based on Tillich's explanation in "Rejoinder," the translucency that he wants to emphasize coheres to his conception of the *Anschaulichkeit* of the symbolized through the symbol.

<sup>52</sup> Tillich, "Rejoinder," 187. The shift from translucency to transparency also rebuffs Ford's critique found in Ford, "The three strands," 115.

<sup>53</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, 240. See also Tillich, *DF*, 55. In *DF* the use of the preposition "in" instead of "through" or "by" to describe the relationship of the symbol to manifestations of the divine fits well with Tillich's description of translucency.

<sup>54</sup> Ford, "The three strands," 110.

<sup>55</sup> See also Tillich, *Religiöse Verwirklichung*, 104-105. Of course, this understanding of the pane of stained glass is not consonant to the contemporary understanding as in physics (I am indebted to Robert Russell for explaining this to me). White light, which has all frequencies of light, encounters a pane of glass that we perceive as stained because it absorbs all colors of the light *except* for the one frequency that we see that it allows to pass through. I believe it is an open question if this understanding changes the way we might constructively interpret Tillich's concept of symbol.

<sup>56</sup> Ford, "The Three Strands," 118-121 & 123-124.

<sup>57</sup> Tillich, "Rejoinder," 188.

<sup>58</sup> Tillich, *Religiöse Verwirklichung*, 89.

<sup>59</sup> See Tillich, *DF*, 48; *Theology of Culture*, 53-55.

<sup>60</sup> Tillich, *Religiöse Verwirklichung*, 88.

<sup>61</sup> Grigg, *Symbol and Empowerment*, 28-29. See also Richard Grigg, "The Experiential center of Tillich's system," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53, no. 2 (June 1985): 253. The place of the symbol in his analysis of Tillich's *The Courage to Be* is quite clear: the structure that empowers the individual to move in courage past the mood of anxiety. This process is also described in the primary sources: see Tillich, *Religiöse Verwirklichung*, 104-105; Paul Tillich, "Religious Symbols and Our Knowledge of God," *The Christian Scholar* 38, no. 3 (September 1955): 189-197, 191ff. While Grigg's post-theistic interpretation presses beyond the bounds of Tillich's own theology, it perceptively attunes to the rudiments of postmodern concepts that never burgeon to full expression. His footnotes in *Symbol and Empowerment* provide excellent analysis of Tillich's work that respects

its ultimately modernist/idealist framework. On the issue of participation see Grigg, *Symbol and Empowerment*, 36-37, n. 18.

<sup>62</sup> See William Rowe, *Religious Symbols and God: A Philosophical Study of Tillich's Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), chch. 4 & 5. Tillich's interpretation and criticism of Cassirer and critical idealism makes any legitimate argument for reading symbol deconstruction in Tillich's work highly unlikely. See Tillich, *Religiöse Verwirklichung*, 95-101.

<sup>63</sup> Donald F Dreisbach, "Paul Tillich's Hermeneutic," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 43 (March 1, 1975): 86-87.

<sup>64</sup> Dreisbach, "Paul Tillich's Hermeneutic," 87 & 89. See also Tillich, *ST I*, 238-239; Ehrlich, "Tillich's Symbol," 153-156. Ehrlich rehearses the same difficulty as Dreisbach, though with reference to some different primary source material. In the end, Ehrlich finds that Tillich's continued search for a "formal requirement for criteriology" (156) is the ultimate source of difference between Tillich's concept of symbol and Jasper's use of "cipher," which has abandoned such a foundationalist epistemology. For our purposes, Ehrlich precisely identifies where Tillich's semiotics remains squarely modernist.

<sup>65</sup> Dreisbach, "Paul Tillich's Hermeneutic," 90.

<sup>66</sup> Rahner's terms in German are "*Realsymbole*" and "*Vertretungssymbole*" respectively. My translation of constitutive symbol and representative symbol follows Albert Liberatore, "Symbols in Rahner: A Note on Translation," *Louvain Studies* 18 (1993): 151, 157-158. Also note James Joseph Buckley, "On Being a Symbol: An Appraisal of Karl Rahner," *Theological Studies* 40, 3 (1979): 460. He is careful to remind us that "Apparently 'mere signs' can function as 'symbols' vis-a-vis an entity other than the one for which they are 'mere signs.'"

<sup>67</sup> Tillich, *DF*, 48.

<sup>68</sup> Rahner, *TI* 4, 225. The focus of this analysis will be on constitutive symbols in order to parallel the analysis of the symbolic in Tillich.

<sup>69</sup> Rahner, *TI* 4, 234. For an analysis of Rahner's work on this point that emphasizes its Neo-Thomistic roots see Stephen Fields, *Being as Symbol: On the Origins and Development of Karl Rahner's Metaphysics* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2000), chs. 1 & 2.

<sup>70</sup> Liberatore, "Symbols in Rahner," 148.

<sup>71</sup> Rahner, *TI* 4, 224.

<sup>72</sup> Rahner also acknowledges that multiplicity in being is also a condition of finitude. He emphasizes the correlation with Trinity though to prevent the multiplicity

from being erroneously conceived of as an imperfection that must be overcome. See Rahner, *TI* 4, 235.

<sup>73</sup> Rahner, *TI* 4, 230.

<sup>74</sup> Rahner, *TI* 4, 231.

<sup>75</sup> Liberatore, "Symbols in Rahner," 152. See also Rahner, *FCF*, 83-84; Rahner, *TI* 4, 244; Hines, *The Transformation of Dogma*, 26; Michael J. Buckley, "Within the Holy Mystery," in O'Donovan, ed. 42; Stephen M. Fields, "Rahner and the Symbolism of Language" *Philosophy & Theology* 15, 1 (2003): 173.

<sup>76</sup> Clearly the challenge of this statement is then to locate the uniqueness of the Christ as a symbol of God and the relationship that exists between anthropological symbols of God and the Christological symbol of God. Such an analysis is beyond the scope of this work. The rudiments of an answer to this question can be sketched out by examining Rahner, *TI* 4, 244-245; Rahner *TI* 11, 220-223 & 226-229. Another option might be to collapse the disparateness of the distinction: "Gottes und der Welt Wirklichkeit sind also nicht voneinander zu scheiden wie Zeit und Ewigkeit, sie sind auch nicht nur ähnlich, sondern sie sind eines. Der Logos offenbart das Wesen Gottes und der Welt (und des Menschen) als eines. Die Transzendenz geht auf im Transzendieren, die Analogia im metaphorischen Wesen der Wirklichkeit. Damit ist der alte Dualismus von Gott und Welt—Voraussetzung für das klassische Analogie- und Symbol-Denken—radikal abgebaut. Gott ist in die Welt hineingenommen, so daß er das Geheimnis der Welt als Metapher, als Transzendierender ist. Indem das Wesen der Wirklichkeit und der Zeit selbst als offen und transzendierend verstanden wird, wird Gott das Herz alles Seins." Hans-Rudolf Müller-Schwefe, "Vom Symbol zur Metapher: Die Wandlung des Symbolbegriffs in der Theologie," in *Die Vielen Namen Gottes : [Gerd Heinz-Mohr z. 60. Geburtstag in Dankbarkeit u. Verehrung gewidmet]*, ed. Meinold Krauss and Johannes Lundbeck (Stuttgart: Steinkopf, 1974), 272-273.

<sup>77</sup> See Rahner, *TI* 4, 247-249; Fields, "Rahner and the Symbolism of Language," 166.; & Liberatore, "Symbols in Rahner," 152-153. While there is plenty of biblical and religious writing relating to this idea of the relationship between parts and their whole, I cannot help but note the correlation between what Rahner has described here and the Goethe's Modular Theory of Evolution. Repeating monomers (the vertebrae in animals and the leaf in plants) are the modular pieces of an organic whole. It is variation in the repeating monomers that make the different parts of an organism. However, the monomers, in principle, are representative of the whole creature. Each of the modular monomers is symbolically possessive of the *fundamentum*

of the organism. See Aaron G. Filler, *The Upright Ape: A New Origin of the Species* (Franklin Lakes, NJ: New Page Books, 2007), chap. 2. Note that this is a different connection to Goethe's thought than the connection to be drawn to the idea of an Archetype. On this point see Fields, *Being as Symbol*, 61-65.

<sup>78</sup> For a different take on the problem space Rahner is addressing through symbolism, though even more generally than it is treated here, see Kuno Füssel, "Die Zeichen der Zeit als locus theologicus: ein Beitrag zur theologischen Erkenntnislehre.," *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 30, no. 1-2 (1983): 260-261.

<sup>79</sup> See Michael Friedman, "Ernst Cassirer.," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, June 30, 2004, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/cassirer/>.

<sup>80</sup> For a concise treatment of Peirce's semiotic theory see Charles S. Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vol. 2, 8 vols. (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1998), 2.227-302. & Albert Atkin, "Pierce's Theory of Signs," *Encyclopedia, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, October 13, 2006, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/peirce-semiotics/>, sections 2 and 3.

<sup>81</sup> A legitimate question arises on this point: does Tillich's opposition to Cassirer stem from a fair reading of his work? Could the dialectic evolution between expressive and representative functions allow for a reading of Cassirer that is less explicitly neo-Kantian than Tillich's interpretation? Such a question exceeds our scope here, but is important to bear in mind as we interpret Tillich's symbolic theory.

<sup>82</sup> In fact it would be just the opposite: a symbol is implicit to the object.

<sup>83</sup> Tillich, *ST* I, 239-240.

<sup>84</sup> See Nancey C. Murphy and James W. McClendon, Jr., "Distinguishing Modern and Postmodern Theologies," *Modern Theology* 5, 3 (April 1989): 192-205, esp. 199.

<sup>85</sup> See Grigg, *Symbol and Empowerment*, chap. 4 & Conclusion.

COMING IN THE SUMMER  
BULLETIN: THE DUES ISSUE AND  
THE FINANCIAL SITUATION OF THE  
NAPTS  
AND  
MORE PAPERS FROM THE MEETING  
IN ATLANTA AND MONTREAL

## MISSION THEOLOGY AND INTERRELIGIOUS ENCOUNTER: 1910–2010

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### Introduction: Edinburgh 1910—The Christian Century

The Edinburgh Mission Conference of 1910, held at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, was a watershed in the history of Christian missions and marked the beginning of a century of vigorous mission activity, first among Protestant Christians, and then also among Roman Catholics and the Orthodox as well. From the perspective of the missionaries who gathered in Edinburgh a century ago, the state of human culture globally was ripe to hear the Christian Gospel, perhaps especially those who belonged to non-Christian religious traditions. Eight commissions tackled the challenges faced by Christian missionaries in the field. The evangelistic zeal that marked the culture of the missionary enterprise of the era is apparent in title of the flagship commission: “Carrying the Gospel to All the Non-Christian World.” The commission entitled “The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions” took a more thoughtful tone, but the commission report was still in the vein of understanding how Christianity fulfilled other religions. The intra-Christian dynamics that might have inhibited the effective spreading of the gospel as it was understood at the time served as the initial impulse for the formation of the ecumenical movement, later institutionalized in the World Council of Churches. Indeed, the twentieth century was to have been the “Christian century,” and in some respects it was.<sup>1</sup>

In 2010, in celebration of the centenary of the 1910 Edinburgh conference, four international conferences were organized to review the mission history of the last century, to take stock of the current mission situation, and to vision the next century of mission. Much has changed about the theological vision and culture surrounding the practice of Christian missions over the past 100 years. On the one hand, missionaries were responsible for or at least complicit in some of the worst cultural and human abuses brought about by colonial imperialism. On the other hand, missionaries were responsible for some of the most careful, reflective, and caring engagements across boundaries of language, culture, and race ever seen in the course of human history. In the maelstrom of a process that was the reality of the

twentieth century mission movement, Christian mission had to be theologically rethought and practically redeveloped.<sup>2</sup> It may be thought that this recasting of mission was primarily brought about in the face of external criticism, but the truth of the matter is that the vast majority of the most searing critiques of mission came from missionaries themselves. In the midst of the voices coming out of the four centenary conferences, this paper seeks to make a contribution to the theological reconception of mission for the twenty-first century in conversation with Paul Tillich, whose theological vision was both influenced by and radically divergent from the mission paradigms of the Edinburgh Mission Conference.

### The Mission Theology of Paul Tillich

Almost fifty years after the Edinburgh Conference, the same enthusiasm for Christian mission continued unabated, although the experience of the Holocaust was beginning to temper some of the evangelistic zeal. Paul Tillich’s March 4, 1955 article for *Christianity and Crisis*, entitled “The Theology of Missions,”<sup>3</sup> exemplifies the view that mission is at the heart of Christian faith and life and that it has something inherently positive to offer the world.

Missions is that activity by the Church by which it works for the transformation of its own latency into its own manifestation all over the world... Missions is not a cultural function; it is rather the function of the Church to spread all over the world... Missions is rather the attempt to transform the latent Church into something new, namely, the New Reality in Jesus as the Christ. Transformation is the meaning of missions.<sup>4</sup>

For Tillich, the transformation at the heart of the mission enterprise is ongoing throughout history, in which the full realization of the Kingdom of God, which he indicates is the symbol of the fulfillment of history, is never fully manifest.

History has a tragic ambiguity; but the Kingdom of God is the symbol for an unambiguous situation, a purification of history, something in which the demonic is conquered, the fulfillment is reached, and the ambiguous is thrown out.<sup>5</sup> The Church, which is the symbol of the Kingdom of God in history, is always a mixture of the latent church and the manifest church, which is the church embodying the New Being in Christ. The work of mission is the work that

participates in the transformation from latency to manifestation.

Missionary work is that work in which the potential universality of Christianity becomes evident day by day, in which the universality is actualized with every new success of the missionary endeavor.<sup>6</sup> Universality is central to Tillich's conception of the New Being. He acknowledges that his use of the term "universality" in connection with Christianity is continuous with the discussions of the absoluteness of Christianity in liberal theology. He modifies the discussion of absoluteness, however, by insisting that the universality of Christianity is not something that can be proved theoretically *a priori*. It is something that can only be known pragmatically *a posteriori*. The work of missions is not to make Christianity universal but to reveal the potential universality of Christianity already at work. Furthermore, since Tillich is committed to the view that the Kingdom of God is never fully manifest in history, but is always mixed with at least some latency, the work of missions is never done: "if you are in the historical situation in which missions are, then you offer a continuous proof, a proof which is never finished."<sup>7</sup>

The topic of Christian mission is broached again in Tillich's *Systematic Theology*, Volume III, in his discussion of the Holy Spirit and the church. In the context of his discussion of "the functions of the churches, their ambiguities, and the Spiritual Community," Tillich specifically locates the work of mission in the second of three functions of the churches: constitution, expansion, and construction. The functions are correlated with three polarities that serve to describe the ambiguity inherent in each function. The polarity in the function of constitution is tradition and reformation; that of expansion is verity and adaptation; that of construction is form-transcendence and form-affirmation. The functions of expansion are those that Tillich identifies with mission, with their correlated polarity of verity and adaptation defining the ambiguity inherent in expansion. The danger of verity is absolutism while that of adaptation is relativism. The question of the function of expansion for the churches is how to navigate between the absolutism that led to an ethos of colonial imperialism in mission and the relativism that would disprove the universality of the New Being in Christ.<sup>8</sup>

It is likely shocking to some that thus far Tillich's theology of missions does not seem to be too terribly far away from the mission vision advanced by the 1910 Edinburgh conference. (This would be a

special shock to those surprised to find that Tillich had a theology of missions *at all!*) To be sure, he explicitly discouraged his readers from interpreting mission as "an attempt to save from eternal damnation as many individuals as possible from among the nations of the world." But, he also rejected the notions from liberal theology that mission is "a cross-fertilization of cultures" because doing so neglects the universality of the church and thus its necessary growth; or that mission is about unifying religions because this would deny that the church is the agency of the Kingdom of God. At times, Tillich can be outright triumphalistic:

The element of faith is always present, and faith is a risk. But a risk must be justified, and that is what missions does. It shows that Jesus as the Christ and the New Being in him has the power to conquer the world. In conquering the world, missions is the continuous pragmatic test of the universality of the Christ, of the truth of the Christian assertion that Jesus is the Christ.<sup>9</sup>

But that triumphalism seems to sit uneasily with his condemnation of the "unconscious arrogance that assumes that Christianity, as it has developed in the Western world, is the reality of the New Being in Christ."<sup>10</sup> To understand how Tillich is able to hold such disparate claims together in a coherent, consistent, adequate, and applicable framework, we must first take a brief detour through his theology of culture and theory of symbolic religious language.

### Theology of Culture and Symbolic Religious Language

Tillich was a prophet of the theology of culture. This arose from his existential approach to religion, one consequence of which is that "religion as ultimate concern is the meaning-giving substance of culture, and culture is the totality of forms in which the basic concern of religion expresses itself. In abbreviation: religion is the substance of culture, culture is the form of religion."<sup>11</sup> The existential approach itself consists in the claim that "if we look at the human spirit from a special point of view, it presents itself to us as religious... Religion is not a special function of man's spiritual life, but it is the dimension of depth in all of its functions."<sup>12</sup> This depth dimension in spiritual life signifies "being ultimately concerned about that which is and should be our ultimate concern. This means that faith is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern."<sup>13</sup> The resulting intimate binding of religion and culture, of sa-



cred and secular, means that there is no escape from religion in Tillich's view. Ultimate concern is to Tillich very much what the feeling of absolute dependence is for Schleiermacher.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, anyone who participates in a culture, which is everyone, has a religion as the substance of that culture.

These ideas are at the heart of Tillich's theological project, but they bear review here because of the fact that Tillich understands language to be a cultural artifact.<sup>15</sup> The implications for religious language are especially important.

No sacred language has fallen from a supernatural heaven and placed between the covers of a book. But, there is human language, based on man's encounter with reality, changing through the millennia, used for the needs of daily life, for expression and communication, for literature and poetry, and used also for the expression and communication of our ultimate concern.<sup>16</sup> "Religious language is ordinary language," and is, therefore, just as much a cultural artifact as ordinary language. Any language that gives voice to the depth dimension of life in a culture is the religious language of that culture, given the unity of religion and culture effected above.

Not only is religious language a cultural artifact, it is also symbolic. Tillich is famous for saying that the only non-symbolic statement about God is that God is being-itself or ground of being.<sup>17</sup> All other theological language is symbolic, which is to say that like a sign: it points beyond itself, but unlike a sign, it participates in the reality and power of that to which it points. Unlike a sign, a symbol cannot be replaced with any other symbol. Symbols are compelling and have influence over those who employ them because of their participation in the reality and power of that to which they point.<sup>18</sup> At the end of his consideration of the work of symbols, Tillich makes a move that prefigures the work Peter Berger would do in *The Sacred Canopy*<sup>19</sup> a decade later:

"Out of what womb are symbols born?" Out of the womb which is usually called today the "group unconscious" or "collective unconscious" ... It is not invented intentionally; and even if somebody would try to invent a symbol, as sometimes happens, then it becomes a symbol only if the unconscious of a group says "yes" to it. It means that something is opened up by it... Now this implies further that in the moment in which this inner situation of the human group to a symbol has ceased to exist, then the symbol

dies. The symbol does not "say" anything any more.<sup>20</sup>

In the language of the theology of culture, a religious symbol ceases to speak when it no longer evokes the depth dimension of life. The implication of the fact that language is a cultural artifact amidst all of this is that different words may function as different symbols within particular cultures.

These considerations become helpful in interpreting Tillich's understanding of the work of the theologian. This is most clearly stated at the outset of *Systematic Theology*, Volume I.

While the philosopher of religion tries to remain general and abstract in his concepts, as the concept "religion" itself indicates, the theologian is consciously and by intention specific and concrete... The theologian... claims the universal validity of the Christian message in spite of its concrete and special character. He does not justify this claim by abstracting from the concreteness of the message but by stressing its unrepeatable uniqueness.<sup>21</sup>

This is to say that the theologian is obligated to deploy the religious symbols of their culture in language. The irony here is that all of Tillich's talk about the existential approach to religion and relationship between religion and culture do not properly belong to theology because they do not deploy any religious symbols but instead seek to generalize and remain abstract. His book should have been titled *Philosophy of Culture*, not the *Theology of Culture*. In order for language actually to connect people with their ultimate concern, language must be symbolically connected to the reality of that which they take to be ultimate. This means that the theologian is obligated to discern what symbolic language is alive in a culture and deploy it. Failure to deploy the symbolic religious language of the culture is to abdicate the role of theologian.

### **Reinterpreting Tillich's Theology of Mission**

It is extremely important to read Tillich's "The Theology of Missions" very carefully, in light of what we have just seen from the *Theology of Culture* and the *Systematic Theology*, if we are to understand his true meaning and the radical nature of his reinterpretation. "The Theology of Missions," unlike *Theology of Culture*, is properly titled. Tillich extravagantly deploys the Christian symbols to interpret the goals, objectives, and value of mission endeavors. As a theologian in the culture of the mid-

20<sup>th</sup> century America, just following World War II and the Shoah, and in the wake of the mission fervor evoked by the 1910 Edinburgh Mission Conference, Tillich was obligated to employ the symbolic religious language of Christianity, the religious language of this culture, to give theological answers to existential or philosophical questions.<sup>22</sup> “Theology is the methodical interpretation of the contents of the Christian faith.”<sup>23</sup>

The questions to be answered here, then, are as follows: What are the Christian symbolic terms that Tillich is working with? What account does Tillich give of the realities and powers in which these symbols participate? Finally, how does the systematic ordering of the symbols evoke a novel perspective on the nature and work of mission? Thankfully, identifying the symbolic terms is relatively straightforward as Tillich usually capitalizes his theological symbolic terms. We begin by looking at the symbols and the nature of what Tillich identifies as the realities and powers in which they participate before turning to an analysis of their systematic deployment.

Tillich identifies two Christian symbols as central to the theology of missions. The first is the theological answer to the existential question, or the existential ambiguity of history, namely the Kingdom of God. “The Kingdom of God is a symbol for the unity of history in and above history.”<sup>24</sup> This is to say that history is marked by the ambiguities of time, but that the Kingdom of God participates in the reality and power of eternity. In history, a continuous mixture of good and evil exists, in every group, in every agency that carries the historical process, in every period, in every historical actualization. History has a tragic ambiguity; but the Kingdom of God is the symbol for an unambiguous situation, a purification of history, something in which the demonic is conquered, the fulfillment is reached, and the ambiguous is thrown out. In this threefold sense, as fulfillment, unification, and purification of history, the Kingdom of God is the answer to the riddle of history.<sup>25</sup>

For Tillich, while the Kingdom of God transcends history, as its fulfillment, unification, and purification, it is also immanent within history in the second Christian symbol central to the theology of missions: the Church. The Christian Church, the embodiment of the New Being in community, represents the Kingdom of God in history. The Church itself is not the Kingdom of God, but it is its agent, its anticipation, and its fragmentary realization. It is

fighting in history; and since it represents the Kingdom of God it can be distorted, but it can never be conquered.<sup>26</sup>

Tillich divides history into two sections around a center, the New Being in Jesus the Christ. The New Being in Jesus as the Christ is the full manifestation of the meaning of history, which is the Kingdom of God, the fulfillment, unification and purification of history. The period before the New Being is manifest is the period of the latent Church, while the period after the New Being is manifest is the period of the manifest Church. It is important to emphasize, however, that this interpretation of the center of history transcends history and is relative to history such that at any particular point in history some of the world is in latency and other parts are living in the period of the manifest Church. This is the content of the ambiguity of history. It is clear, then, that Tillich is not speaking of any institution or historical/sociological reality that might be identified as church. The Church as a symbolic religious term simply refers to anywhere that the New Being is made manifest. Irenaeus is famous for saying that wherever the Spirit is, there is the church. Tillich would say that wherever the New Being is manifest, there is the church.

Of course, Tillich has already introduced another symbolic religious term into the discussion, namely, the New Being in Jesus as the Christ. There is, however, something a little bit strange about this particular symbolic religious term. Certainly Jesus Christ is a central symbolic religious term in the culture out of which Tillich was theologizing. It is less clear that the New Being is such a symbolic religious term. It is certainly not a term that has come up often in the course of religious history. That said, it is a term that participates in the reality and power of the existentialist worldview so prevalent in Tillich’s culture. Insofar as the term “New Being” gives voice to the depth dimension of life in an existentialist culture, it is in fact a legitimate symbolic religious term. It is important to note that in employing the term, Tillich is narrowing the scope of his public from his Christian culture more generally to the culture of Christian existentialism. This narrower scope of his public is an important part of what creates the ambivalence visible in what Tillich is doing in “The Theology of Missions.”

There is something else strange about the symbolic religious term “the New Being in Jesus as the Christ.” What is this “Jesus *as the* Christ?” Why does he not simply speak of Jesus Christ? By insert-

ing “as the” into the symbolic religious term “Jesus Christ,” Tillich is able to employ Christ as a functional term referring to the New Being, and abstract it from the historical reality of the historical Jesus. Nevertheless, he is able to connect the New Being to the historical person of Jesus by acknowledging that the historical Jesus participates by functioning as the Christ. This is to say that the historical Jesus is not the fullness of the New Being in himself, but participates in the function of being Christ and so can serve as a symbol, potentially one among others, of the New Being. Whereas for Irenaeus, wherever the Spirit is, there is the church; so for Tillich, wherever the New Being is, there is the Christ.

We have already seen that for Tillich mission is the transformation of the latent Church into the manifest Church. The Church is the embodiment of the New Being in community, and the New Being is the manifestation of the Kingdom of God, the manifestation of the fulfillment, unification, and purification of history. Mission, then, is the transformation from the ambiguity of life and the human predicament, which in Tillich’s existentialism is centrally defined by estrangement or standing out of essence, into the clarity brought about by a return to essence. “New Being is essential being under the conditions of existence, conquering the gap between essence and existence.”<sup>27</sup> Now we have some language to understand what Tillich meant by the New Being in Jesus as the Christ conquering the world. This is not the cultural conquest of colonial imperialism but the spiritual conquest of estrangement. To be sure, the symbolic term “conquest” participates in the violent reality of war, but by participating in the reality and power of that violence it evokes the weight and depth and pain of the struggle to overcome alienation and estrangement to return to essence.

What gives rise to the sounding of triumphalism in Tillich’s mission theology is his willingness to deploy the Christian symbols along traditional lines even as he is doing something radically different from what many Christians of his time and ours would understand those symbols to mean. Tillich was less concerned with clarity and precision than he was with getting the symbolic religious terms operating together coherently, consistently, and correlating to the existential/philosophical questions of his day. This means that Tillich has a higher tolerance for the symbols crashing around and into one another. He also understands symbols functioning at a higher level of abstraction than that at which they are typically deployed in much theological dis-

course. This abstraction is not the “method of abstraction,” which he found odious,<sup>28</sup> but rather a movement from historical and sociological realities to ideal realities, à la Platonic ideas, which pull the symbols toward the universal, the tension between which and the concrete realities Tillich finds so fecund for theology.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, this understanding of symbol results in further confusion in attempting to interpret his mission theology, since the symbols are abstracted from historical, concrete realities toward the universal, instead of simply abiding in the messiness of historical concreteness. This move to abstraction brings us to our last section, in which I examine the meaning of Tillich’s mission theology for interreligious encounter.

### **Mission Theology and Interreligious Encounter**

The same abstraction from historical and sociological realities that led to confusion as to the perspective Tillich takes in his mission theology creates even greater confusion as to Tillich’s perspective on other religions and interreligious encounter. Tillich claims that religion is the depth structure of human life. Christ is the New Being of that depth structure, and Christianity is the participation of the depth structure of human life in the New Being. Other religions, then, are the depth structure without the New Being. However, given the move to abstract from historical and sociological realities, Tillich allows no easy distinction into the categories of Christian, Jew, pagan, or humanist with respect to any given person or social group. It is important to understand what Tillich means by each of these symbolic terms.

What does Christianity mean if participation of the depth structure of human life in the New Being is not localized either in an individual or a group? When Tillich claims that, “there is always paganism, Judaism and humanism in the midst of the Christian nations themselves,” he is not saying that pagan, Jewish and humanist minorities live in Christian majority countries. He is not making a sociological claim but a theological claim. Christianity is the spiritual lives of individual people and groups insofar as they participate in the New Being. “In some way and on some level, every human being is longing for a new reality in contrast to the distorted reality in which he is living.”<sup>30</sup> This means that if we were to take any individual, a proportion of that person’s spiritual life may participate in the New Being. Everyone is subject to some level of distortion, including manifest Christians. This is also why Chris-

tianity can only be universal in a pragmatic sense. Since the Kingdom of God is never fully realized in history, it will be never be the case that Christianity can be demonstrated to be universal with certainty in history. The reason that the Kingdom of God can never be fully realized in history is that historical life is ambiguous, and even spiritual life that participates in the New Being is still a mixture of essence and existence.

Just as Christianity is abstracted from all social and historical realities, so too is paganism. For Tillich, paganism is the symbol of any person or group of people that for one reason or another is not in a position yet to participate in the New Being. People are not outside of God; they are grasped by God, on the level in which they can be grasped—in their experience of the Divine, in the realm of holiness in which they are living, in which they are educated, in which they have performed acts of faith and adoration and prayer and cult, even if the symbols in which the Holy was expressed seem to us extremely primitive and idolatrous.<sup>31</sup> Paganism is thus a symbol for the latent Church generally.

Judaism for Tillich is also the latent Church, in a state of preparation for the New Being. All that was said of paganism is true also for Judaism. But there is something special about Judaism. The Jews have an everlasting function in history. “Ever” means as long as there is still history, and, therefore, paganism. The function of Judaism would be to criticize, in the power of the prophetic spirit, those tendencies in Christianity that drive toward paganism and idolatry.<sup>32</sup>

Tillich is not confident on this point, but he seems to be suggesting that Judaism may be necessary for the success of Christian missions and Christianity in general in order to avoid falling back into the latent church. For Tillich, the proper mode of interaction with Jews is to “subject ourselves as Christians to the criticism of their prophetic tradition.”<sup>33</sup>

The last tradition Tillich engages in “The Theology of Missions” is humanism, which is also the latent Church. However, just as the function of Judaism in history is to prophetically urge Christianity on into becoming ever more the manifest Church, the function of humanism is to offer criticism of the manifest Church.

There are many people who are critical of Church, Christianity, and religion generally. Many times, this criticism comes from the latent Church, directed against the manifest Church, and is often

effected through the power of principles which belong to, and should be effective in, the manifest Church itself.<sup>34</sup>

Tillich goes on to suggest that the proffering of criticism is a sign of a “hidden desire” to become part of the manifest church. “This can happen, however, only if the manifest Church accepts the criticism which comes from the latent Church.”<sup>35</sup> This is to say that Christianity must always humbly acknowledge that even as it strives to become ever more the New Being, it is always becoming so in the context of estranged existence, which always requires further purification. The work of humanism is to remind Christianity of the principles of life in the New Being that it sometimes forgets and can only be reminded of from the outside. Once again, Christianity requires humanism in order to be Christian.

The fact that for Tillich none of these traditions is bound by sociological or historical boundaries means that not all of those who call themselves Christians are Christians, and that some who call themselves Buddhists or Hindus or Muslims or Jews or atheists or agnostics might in fact be Christians. For Irenaeus, wherever the Spirit is, there is the church; so for Tillich, wherever the New Being is, there is the Christ, and wherever the New Being is manifest, there is the Church. This is something like what Martin Luther King, Jr., conveyed in his 1959 Palm Sunday Sermon in which he eulogizes Mohandas Gandhi and credits Gandhi with greater works than Jesus Christ. As we conclude, let us consider what Tillich’s mission theology might have to offer for interreligious encounter and mission in the twenty-first century.

### **Conclusion: 2010—A Future of Mission and Interreligious Encounter**

Now, in 2010, a century of Christian missions has past. Furthermore, the global religious landscape has changed significantly, or at least attention to continuous change has been drawn. As a sociological reality, the center of gravity of global Christianity has shifted from southern Spain to Timbuktu, as described in the recently released *Atlas of Global Christianity*.<sup>36</sup> From his 1955 article, it seems that Tillich would have been neither surprised nor particularly alarmed by this development, and certainly not to the extent of the anxiety that many western theologians and ecclesiasts, who claim to follow in his footsteps, seem to experience. Indeed, Tillich’s mission theology prophetically announces the rising

global church in which the New Being in Christ has been latent but is being made manifest, not according to western designs and schemes, but according to the dialectics of the cultures in which they arise.

There is also a mission to the Christians by those non-Christians to whom Christian missions are addressed. What Christian missions have to offer is not Christianity—certainly not American, German, or British Christianity—but the message of Jesus as the Christ, as the New Being. It is the message about Jesus as the center of history that, day by day, is confirmed by missions. It is not, however, Christianity as an historical reality that is this center of history.<sup>37</sup> Tillich acknowledges that independence is developmental, but sees the global church as a check on western arrogance.

In the *Theology of Culture*, Tillich addresses the issue of religious language and comes down strongly on the side of doing exactly what he did in “The Theology of Missions,” actually employing the symbolic language of religion. In this way, Tillich’s theology of culture offers a helpful corrective to the struggles in many of the discussions of interreligious dialogue, theology of religions, and comparative theology today that attempt to ameliorate the conflicts among religious symbols when religious people interact. Tillich would have been strongly opposed to methods that deny religious symbols, instead asking those who participate in interreligious encounter to bring their symbols with them and let them “crash around and break.”

Nevertheless, as Tillich points out, there are also points at which symbols no longer refer, at which they die. It seems to me that this is the case with the symbols of Christianity, paganism, Judaism, and humanism as Tillich deploys them. His move to abstraction, while enabling him to be deferential to and critical of these traditions in novel ways, is inappropriate in an age of extreme religious pluralism and religious violence where confusion as to the meaning of these identity markers could actually have life or death consequences. That said, his move to abstraction does point us toward three important values for interreligious engagement.

First, Tillich’s move to abstraction points toward the value of humility in interreligious encounter. By defining Christianity as the manifestation of the New Being, and also insisting that the New Being in history is always under the historical conditions of existence estranged from essence, Tillich is building a particular type of humble fallibilism into his theology. He indicates this in defining the missiological

enterprise as fundamentally a pragmatic proof of the universality of Christianity. The capacity to acknowledge that the pursuit of the Kingdom of God is never fully realized in history characterizes Tillich’s humble fallibilism with an imperfectionism that breeds humility. It is out of this groundwork of humility that the other two values emerge.

The second virtue in Tillich’s move to abstraction is vulnerability. It was the early American pragmatists, including Charles Sanders Peirce and John Dewey, who drew the conclusion that fallibilism requires a method of inquiry that makes its conclusions vulnerable to correction. Tillich builds this into the mission enterprise in the engagement of Christian missions with other religions. In fact, Tillich pushes the need for vulnerability to the extreme. He goes so far as to claim that Christianity truly needs other religions in order to be Christianity in the context of the historical situation. Furthermore, the universality of the New Being is not a foregone conclusion but a reality to be discovered and made manifest in the process of mission. Because the answer “the New Being” is given to the question of existence, understanding of what it means to participate in the New Being may change as deeper understandings of the question of existence emerge. It is the New Being as the fulfillment, unification, and purification of existence returning to essence that Tillich believes mission may find to be universal. Thus, it is most crucial to make the New Being itself an idea in the minds of missionaries, vulnerable to correction.

Finally, Tillich’s move to abstraction insists on deference to difference. Humble fallibilism and vulnerability to correction necessitate deference to those who may be in a position to improve the fullness of the manifestation of the New Being and our understanding of it. As my teacher, Robert Neville, likes to say, “it is important to work hard to have the best theory in the room, but if it turns out to be wrong, you should want to be the first to know about it.” Tillich is clear that the work of missions is not only work internal to Christianity but also non-Christians may bear the missiological burden of transforming the latent Church into the manifest Church by bearing witness to the New Being, even from outside the manifest Church or in a state of latency.

As consideration of the work of mission in the next century moves forward out of the reflective and visionary processes of the four centenary conferences this year, Tillich has something to teach us about God, ourselves, and the ways we relate to one

another. Humility, vulnerability, and deference are not signs of weakness but signs of a great desire and courage to be and to participate in the New Being. Taking up the values of humility, vulnerability, and deference can unleash a creative semiosis, in which new symbols that participate in the power and reality of our ultimate concern make the New Being more and more manifest. We will never escape the ambiguous reality of existence in history estranged from essence. The New Being will never enact the fulfillment, unification, and purification of history within history. For that we must wait for the fullness of the Kingdom of God. What we can do is pursue the universality of the New Being and the transformation of ourselves and all creation from the old being toward participation in the New. We can be missionaries.

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief history of the 1910 Edinburgh Mission Conference and its significance, see Keneth R. Ross. *Edinburgh 2010: Springboard for Mission*. (Pasadena: William Carey International University Press, 2010): 1-18.

<sup>2</sup> David J. Bosch. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> Paul Tillich. "The Theology of Missions." *Christianity in Crisis*. 4 March 1955. accessed via Religion Online. < <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=390>>. 16 September 2010.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Paul Tillich. *Systematic Theology*, Volume Three. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963): 182-88.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Tillich. "The Theology of Missions." *op. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Paul Tillich. *Theology of Culture*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959): 42.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*: 5.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*: 40.

<sup>14</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher. *The Christian Faith*. (London: T&T Clark, 1999): 5-18.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Tillich. *Theology of Culture*. *op. cit.*: 47-8. This is a controversial view from the perspective of linguistics, but one that gains credence in light of Terrance Deacon. *The Symbolic Species*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998).

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*: 47.

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<sup>17</sup> Paul Tillich. *Systematic Theology*, Volume One. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951): 238-39. See also Paul Tillich. *Theology of Culture*. *op. cit.*: 61.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Tillich. *Theology of Culture*. *op. cit.*: 56-58.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Berger. *The Sacred Canopy*. (New York: Doubleday, 1967).

<sup>20</sup> Paul Tillich. *Theology of Culture*. *op. cit.*: 58.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Tillich. *Systematic Theology*, Volume One. *op. cit.*: 9-10.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*: 59-66.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*: 15.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Tillich. "The Theology of Missions." *op. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Paul Tillich. *Systematic Theology*, Volume Two. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957): 118-19.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Tillich. *Systematic Theology*, Volume One. *op. cit.*: 107.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*: 16-17, 211-35.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Tillich. "The Theology of Missions." *op. cit.*

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Todd Johnson and Kenneth Ross, eds. *An Atlas of Global Christianity*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

<sup>37</sup> Paul Tillich. "The Theology of Missions." *op. cit.*

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**GUIDE TO THE PERPLEXED: AN ATTEMPT  
TO MAKE SENSE OF THE TILlich-  
HISAMATSU DIALOGUES**

CLAUDE PERROTTET

## Introduction

Direct contact has a unique way of clarifying things, though often in a painful way—notably in the dialogue between cultures and religions. Among the major 20<sup>th</sup> century Christian theologians, Paul Tillich is probably the one who has most consistently shown appreciation for the world's religious traditions, including Buddhism, but it is only towards the end of his life that he had the opportunity to establish that direct contact through meetings with representatives of Japanese Zen.

Judging from the main available documents on this encounter, the three 1957 dialogues with Zen master Shin'ichi Hisamatsu,<sup>1</sup> the reality of Zen must have hit Tillich's inquisitive mind somewhat in the same way as "being" confronts "thinking," like an unmovable wall, in Tillich's own philosophy of religion. To Tillich's considerable credit, he did not in any way seek to remove the obstacle by rationalizing the existence of differences and disagreements. These differences, we will see, are as significant as the very real elective affinities between the Christian thinker who said that God "does not *exist*" and the Zen tradition that emphasizes nothingness.

The 1957 dialogues are thus not a case of generic confrontation between Christianity and Buddhism, but the meeting between the personal vision of Tillich's religious philosophy and the Zen Buddhism of contemporary Japan. Considered by commentators as a rather inconclusive, even clumsy attempt to bridge the big gap between East and West, these dialogues actually reveal the reasons that limit the extent of the family resemblance between the two sides.

### A. Tillich and Buddhism

#### (1) *The starting point*

Since Tillich, nevertheless, has been discussing Buddhism in the context of his typology of religions since the early 1920s, it will be useful to start there to create the proper setting for an evaluation of the 1957 meetings. Tillich's position at that time (a position that would remain largely unchanged) is best

expressed toward the end of his 1920 Berlin lecture (*Berliner Vorlesung*) on the philosophy of religion.

Buddhism is non-speculative... Its goal is immersion (*Versenkung*). Immersion into what, one might ask. The common philosophy of religion finds itself confronted by an enigma here, because it has never been able to detach itself from the speculative form of philosophy of religion. A God who is not hypostasized does not seem to be religious...The immersion of Buddhism, however, is immersion into pure substance (*Gehalt*).<sup>2</sup>

Tillich's last sentence here raises the decisive issue of the entire debate about the similarity and difference between Buddhism and Western theism, notably Christianity. For him, Western religious thought's original sin is to have succumbed to the temptation of objectifying God, making him into a Being, no matter how lofty and special, and speculating about his (its) nature. Buddhism, with its rejection of metaphysics and its negation of anything that could be identified as "god," offers a powerful alternative in his eyes.<sup>3</sup> And that alternative is not an empty one, since the substance, the *Gehalt*, remains intact in its purest form.<sup>4</sup>

Whether this is really the case may largely depend on one's definition of substance, or one's perception of what it represents. It has, in any case, been at the center of the debate on the positive or negative nature of the Buddhist notion of emptiness, nothingness or *śūnyatā* and its relationship to the Western notions of being and non-being.

#### (2) *The debate*

In his discussion of the experiential dimension of religion, Ninian Smart criticizes Rudolf Otto for conflating his famous notion of the numinous with that of mystical experience.<sup>5</sup> Smart's distinction between the two represents one of that author's own trademarks: the numinous is the divine experienced as an external Being that confronts us in its majesty, mysterious and both terrifying and attractive (*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*); a mystical experience is one where the divine is perceived within, without any specific form or identity, and where the mind meets the void through "consciousness-emptying." That second form of religious experience applies both to Buddhism and medieval Christian mysticism, e.g., that of Meister Eckhart, the favorite Western reference for Zen Buddhists.

However, Otto anticipates that objection and insists that the notion of void or emptiness in Buddhist

spirituality (and in the *via negativa* of the Middle Age's mystical theology, though in a slightly different form) in fact accounts for the fullness of being on the level of experience. Non-being, for Otto, is then merely an ideogram used to describe the indescribable "wholly other."<sup>6</sup> Thus, for him, there is identity between the core of being, the numinous, and non-being, because both symbolically express what cannot be adequately explained in rational language. Non-being is a negation of the rational concept of being, not the negation of its *Gehalt*.<sup>7</sup>

Keiji Nishitani speaks in similar terms: "The standpoint of śūnyatā...is not a standpoint of simply negative negativity...It is the standpoint at which absolute negation is at the same time...a Great Affirmation."<sup>8</sup> This is also very much the point of Tillich, as we will discover.

On the other hand, as Yoshinori Takeuchi puts it, in the discussion on being and non-being, Western philosophers and theologians regularly align themselves on the side of being, which plays a pivotal role in Western civilization. In Buddhism, the central notion is the idea of "nothingness."<sup>9</sup>

### (3) Non-being in the Western tradition

Thus, as Takeuchi notes, the tradition of Western thought strongly emphasizes being over non-being. But the latter, with its mysterious appeal, the questions it raises, and the *aporia* it often leads to in thought systems, has generated enough writing to fill volumes.

The discussion starts with Parmenides' famous denial of motion, since for him it would imply non-being, the negation of being, which is everything (in response to his predecessor Heraclitus, for whom motion and change were everything). Along the same lines, Zeno of Elea is well known for trying to prove that an arrow can never reach its goal. In his dialogue *Parmenides*, Plato presents a meticulous analysis of the question of being and non-being or not-being and how they exclude each other.<sup>10</sup>

Later, when discussing *creatio ex nihilo* in his *Monologion*, St. Anselm felt forced to clarify that nothing meant "not anything" and not some substance called nothing.<sup>11</sup> Tillich himself has tried to revive the Ancient Greek distinction between absolute non-being, *ouk on* (οὐκ ὄν) and *me on* (μη ὄν), the non-being that has the potential for dialectical interaction with being. Thus, though being is the central focus of Western thought, non-being has literally been following it like a shadow. The reasons, from the Zen perspective, are obvious:

being is not the Ultimate; it is a conceptual formulation of it and it automatically calls for its opposite, a process that can never be resolved on that level of rational thinking.

If we now turn to the Tillich-Hisamatsu dialogues, one critical point appears immediately: for Tillich, God is qualified as *esse ipsum*.<sup>12</sup> For Buddhism, on the other hand, and particularly for Hisamatsu's Zen, the realm of genuine reality is beyond being and non-being. Thus, what is the ultimate for one of the two thinkers (Tillich) is something to be overcome for the other (Hisamatsu), or so it seems.

## B. Direct Encounter: The Tillich-Hisamatsu dialogues

### (1) The setting

Dr. Shin'ichi Hisamatsu, a lay Zen scholar and disciple of Kitaro Nishida, had spent the year 1957 as a visiting professor at Harvard. His lectures focused on his recently released book on Zen and the Fine Arts, which explains why the conversations he would have with his Western colleagues involved many exchanges about the meaning of art. On his way back to his home country in 1958, Hisamatsu would also visit Carl-Gustav Jung in Switzerland, near Zurich, and Martin Heidegger in Freiburg, Germany.<sup>13</sup>

The points of contact and similarities between the thought of Paul Tillich and Zen Buddhism are obvious and well-known, notably Tillich's ubiquitous use of the notion of paradox, but also his contention that negating the existence of God is essential to religiosity, rather than a sign of impiety—a paradox in itself.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, following his predecessors, the philosophers of religion, Rudolf Otto and Ernst Troeltsch, Tillich has always maintained an open approach towards the world's religions, in stark contrast to Karl Barth and many of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's major theologians. In his latter years, he has particularly developed the dialogue with Eastern religions, acknowledging an affinity with the approach of Zen Buddhism, notably in one of his famous 1961 *Bampton Lectures* at Columbia University.<sup>15</sup>

And Tillich's contribution to the dialogue between East and West has been acknowledged on both sides of the divide. His name is mentioned in just about every publication on the topic, and his work has been used as a prime example for a possible interface between the two approaches. On



the Eastern side, this includes Kee Chong Ryu's *Nāgārjuna's Emptiness and Paul Tillich's God: A Comparative Study for the Dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism*<sup>16</sup> and Yoshinori Takeuchi's 1959 *Festschrift* in honor of Tillich.<sup>17</sup>

## (2) Elective affinities and family resemblance

The 1957 dialogues offer a good display of the already mentioned similarities and affinities between Tillich and Hisamatsu's Zen. In fact, they show that there are striking similarities between the two. These similarities are due to the fact that both have grappled with the same difficulties found in more traditional ways of thinking—be it Christianity or Buddhism. Before turning to the equally significant differences, I will offer a brief survey of the main points of contact or even agreement.<sup>18</sup>

### (a) *Rational discourse: insufficient but inescapable*

For both, the rational discourse is fundamentally unable to grasp the nature of reality, yet it cannot be discarded either. As Hisamatsu puts it, the “ultimate antinomy” or dichotomy between the positive and the negative, good and evil, needs to be solved at its root, something that cannot be done through cognitive learning, morality, or art. But he immediately adds: “Still, to solve this problem that reason cannot solve, there must be a solution that will nevertheless satisfy reason.” The desperate attempts by Hisamatsu and his translators to convey to Tillich the meaning of their religious philosophy through words rather than through non-verbal ways, is symptomatic of that intent—and its challenges.

Tillich summarizes his own views at the beginning of the first encounter by saying that words are deceptive, but inevitable—they are “the only things which communicate.”<sup>19</sup> In 1922, Tillich had already stated that, “‘Religion’ is the concept of a reality which through this very concept is destroyed. Yet the concept is unavoidable” and religion “can do nothing other than work with...concepts.”<sup>20</sup> This leads to the question of the relationship between religion and philosophy.

### (b) *Religion and philosophy: philosophy of religion*

Here also, there is a similarity of views. For Tillich,

If a reunion of theology and philosophy is ever to be possible it will be achieved only in a synthesis that does justice to this experience of the abyss in our lives [revealed by WW I]. My philosophy of religion has attempted to meet this

need. It consciously remains on the boundary between theology and philosophy, taking care not to lose the one in the other. *It attempts to express the experience of abyss in philosophical concepts...* [emphasis added].<sup>21</sup>

In his conversation with Carl-Gustav Jung, who warned him that he (Jung) was a psychologist, and not a philosopher, Hisamatsu responds: “In a sense, one might say that Zen is a philosophy, but it is very different from ordinary philosophy, which depends on human intellectual activity. One might therefore say that Zen is no philosophy. Zen is a philosophy and at the same time a religion, but no ordinary religion. It is ‘religion and philosophy.’”<sup>22</sup>

### (c) *What is religion?*

The overall question, “what is religion?” for the two thinkers is too far-reaching to be dealt with here, though a collection of Tillich's early essays in English has appeared under that very title. One can nevertheless briefly note that both Hisamatsu and Tillich similarly seek the validity of religion not in the assumed truth of its dogma, but in the demonstration that it is a necessary function of the human mind, separate from all other aspects, yet related to them. Hisamatsu speaks of religion's “objective validity” that should be different from that of science, art, and morality. Tillich says as much when he affirms that religion is the most fundamental constitutive function of human consciousness, but at the same time should not be considered apart from the other functions.<sup>23</sup>

### (d) *The sacred and the profane*

Hisamatsu's Zen and Tillich's religious philosophy both stand in contrast to the sacred-profane dichotomy proper to most religious traditions (including much of Buddhism) and discussed by authors like Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade.

In his lengthy explanations on Zen art, Hisamatsu explains that, unlike other forms of Buddhism, Zen does not focus on the formal or cultish elements of sacred motifs. Rather, Zen art finds its material in “what ordinarily would be considered most insignificant—or, indeed, profane.”<sup>24</sup> At the same time, along with Tillich, he deplores the secularization of Japanese art that began with the Tokugawa dynasty (1603-1868). Secularization, here, means a secularization of attitude. For Zen, in art and in life, reaching the “Formless Self” (Hisamatsu's key word, explained below) is a matter of

Awakening, and this takes place in the midst of the most mundane of circumstances.

For Tillich, a consciousness that is entirely profane is unthinkable. “There is no thing that doesn’t carry religious qualities through its relationship to the irrational substance of Being.”<sup>25</sup> In other words, “there is no consciousness unreligious in substance, though it can certainly be so in intention.”<sup>26</sup> Religiousness inevitably accompanies the human mind’s orientation towards the *Unconditional*,<sup>27</sup> even if expressed in the most secular ways. On the other hand, making God into a sacred thing or Being, even the highest one, is real atheism, because it makes God into what he is not.

In his 1961 Bampton lectures, Tillich explicitly and repeatedly refers to the convergence between Japan and the West on the issue of secularization.<sup>28</sup> Both are highly developed industrial nations where the main challenge to the dominant religion comes from secularism and quasi-religions (nationalism, communism, liberalism), rather than from competing religions. Tillich sees this common challenge as a potential starting point for a future dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity.

In fact, this is also the starting point of the 1957 encounter. Tillich says that he is able to focus amidst the noise and confusion of his environment by concentrating on *something* (his task), but admits that this is no longer enough for him. To which Hisamatsu replies that what Tillich needs is Zen’s *objectless* concentration.

#### *(e) The struggle against objectification*

Perhaps the most significant point of convergence is the insight that there is no such thing as an objectified, ultimate reality of any kind. Since the very beginning of his academic career after World War I (1919 and 1920), Tillich has led the charge against “objectification,” what he saw as Western metaphysics’ mistaken assumption that it is possible to grasp God by identifying him conceptually as the Absolute Being, something Martin Heidegger would later refer to as onto-theology. For Tillich, “the Unconditional stands beyond both subject and object.”<sup>29</sup> Experientially, this also means that recovering a faith lost through the onslaught of secularization by rationally demonstrating the existence of a Being called “God” is absurd. It is a self-defeating illusion.<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, at the very beginning of his first conversation with Tillich, Hisamatsu indicates that Zen “means going beyond the subject-object scheme.”<sup>31</sup>

Concentration must also be “objectless” and “subjectless, i.e., non-dualistic.”<sup>32</sup> The Formless Self, in short, transcends both subject and object, just as it transcends all other pairs of dual characteristics. This typical feature appears throughout Hisamatsu’s discourse. Thus, Tillich and Hisamatsu share a common understanding that the ultimate cannot simply be grasped as a thing.<sup>33</sup>

### C. Results of the Encounter

#### (1) Failure?

It is thus rather surprising to see how difficult it has been for Tillich to grasp and digest the paradoxical thought of Zen when confronted with it directly in his three discussions with Shin’ichi Hisamatsu. As Newman Robert Glass puts it, “the fact that such an accomplished thinker as Tillich seems to come off so poorly in the exchange should be humbling to us all.”<sup>34</sup> In these dialogues, Tillich is clearly in the position of the learner, though a very respected one. Hisamatsu was an invited guest lecturer from Japan. He was already well aware of Tillich’s thought and other Western philosophies and theologies. The purpose of his journey was to disseminate knowledge about the yet unknown practice of Zen, especially Zen art.

Yet, if Tillich comes off poorly in his efforts to grasp the meaning of Zen, so does Hisamatsu in his attempt to convey it. His translator De Martino<sup>35</sup> repeatedly shows considerable frustration over the master’s unwillingness to teach Tillich Zen by using the Zen way—that of direct showing, rather than logical reasoning. “For some reason he did not deal with you fully as a Zen teacher, which I believe he should have.”<sup>36</sup> To which Fujiyoshi, the Japanese translator, comments: “I don’t think that...would have been quite appropriate.” There is a mildly humorous exchange over the possibility of Hisamatsu punching Tillich in the stomach to make his point, but things never evolve even remotely in that direction. For whatever reason, Hisamatsu feels obliged to maintain his academic courtesy all the way to the (dead) end.

This inability to really penetrate each other’s mental world, in spite of a relative flexibility and considerable good will on both sides, can easily result in some disappointment on the part of the reader. This is unfortunate because, in spite of the protagonists’ failure to reach mutual understanding, the discussion results in a most important achievement: it clearly shows that the inevitable disagree-

ment is based on the unique and different identities of the two thought systems and their frames of reference. The lengthy exchange, continued over three sessions, with the help of a Japanese and a Western translator, both knowledgeable of the issues as well as the languages involved, exposes the demarcation lines between the two thoughts much better than any document produced separately by the two authors or by a third party. The sometimes chaotic and repetitive nature of the discussion is more than compensated by the fact that neither discussion partner is allowed to indulge in wishful thinking. The constant presence of the other side makes it impossible for either of them to fantasize into existence an imaginary solution supposed to be valid from everyone's perspective.

This certainly explains why both Tillich and Hisamatsu appear to stress the differences between their respective visions more than the common points noted above. Both obviously felt the need to clarify the boundaries while their counterpart was directly present and able to answer questions. In his third *Bampton Lecture*, Tillich would offer a systematic reflection on the relationship between the two approaches, putting much more emphasis on the common ground and the potential for cooperation between Buddhism and Christianity (as he saw it, of course). Unquestionably, the encounter with Hisamatsu, with all its occasional bluntness, provided him with much of the material for his assessment and therefore deserves to be examined in some detail.

## (2) Paradox and contradiction

At first, one might have the impression that Tillich, the theologian of paradox, has at last met a thought that is too paradoxical even for him to comprehend or digest. In fact, the exact opposite is true. It is not Hisamatsu's paradoxical statements that irritate Tillich and leave him perplexed. It is the fact that Hisamatsu presents the Zen way as the complete resolution of the paradoxes he so eloquently states. And it is that which prompts Tillich to reply: "On this issue...there is apparently a profound difference between us. *What I would like to comprehend is how [t]his position is even possible* (emphasis added)."<sup>37</sup> It is thus by examining the respective approaches to paradox and its solution that progress will be made in understanding the positions of Tillich and Hisamatsu. This, in turn, will lead to an analysis of what transcends the pervasive dichotomy of reality,

Tillich's pure Being and Hisamatsu's Formless Self respectively.

## (3) The extent of the solution—and its nature

One important *leitmotiv* in Hisamatsu's conversations with Tillich and Jung is his insistence on the radical, complete nature of the solution provided by the Zen approach. This comes together with Hisamatsu's equally insistent attempts to figure out to what extent his discussion partners even *claim* to find such a solution in their own approach. In his 1958 meeting with Carl Gustav Jung, Hisamatsu asks "Can psychotherapy liberate us from suffering in one fell swoop?"<sup>38</sup> When he further asks whether one can be liberated from the unconscious through psychotherapy, much to his surprise Jung answers "Yes!" The editor of the English version is probably right when he assumes that Jung's answer must have been accompanied with some sense of exasperation not visible in the transcript. He is probably also right in assuming that it is that (and not the translation problems between Hisamatsu's Japanese and Jung's Swiss German dialect) which prompted Jung to prevent publication of the dialogue during his lifetime.<sup>39</sup>

Except for that brief moment, when he perhaps felt forced to preserve the dignity of his method under the pressure of questioning, Jung makes it abundantly clear that suffering is inevitably part of life (he quotes Schopenhauer) and that psychotherapy's goal is merely to help people deal with it, instead of escaping into neurosis when facing the inevitable rainy days. Jung uses *nirdvandva* throughout, rather than the more common *nirvana* used by Hisamatsu. The Sanskrit *nirdvandva* means "freedom from opposites" and fits Jung's outlook much better than *nirvana*, the complete extinction of dualism and opposition. Jung believed that we can learn to manage tensions, not obliterate them. And for Tillich, as he states himself in the dialogues, the solution consists of a dialectical movement towards an infinite horizon (the Kingdom of Heaven) that can never be historically achieved. This exposes him to the same challenge as Jung: Hisamatsu questions the adequacy of their methods on the grounds of their relative nature.

What now follows is not an attempt to describe the essence of Hisamatsu's philosophy or that of Zen in general, something that is both impossible and unnecessary in the present context. It is an effort to show why and how his philosophy and that of Tillich differ in spite of many convergences, notably

from the ontological perspective. A section on Tillich's position will follow.

#### **(4) Hisamatsu: Radical Antinomy and the Formless Self**

##### **(a) Antinomy**

For Hisamatsu, the predicament of human life lies in the fact that in every aspect of reality, every single entity is ineluctably accompanied by its opposite. The best summation of his position is found in the following statement: "What I consider to be the 'ultimate antinomy' is neither exclusively of logic nor of will nor of feeling; it involves all three. It cannot be reduced, therefore, either to contradiction, dilemma, or agony; all three are there as one." De Martino further clarifies: "In Dr. Hisamatsu's view, human nature is such that these several components coalesced as one delineate man's cardinal contradictory antagonism—or 'dualistic opposition.'"<sup>40</sup>

*Antinomy* is a term that Hisamatsu explicitly borrows from Kant, for whom, however, it applies strictly to an *aporia* of human cognition when applied to the realm of the transcendent. Hisamatsu speaks of "ultimate antinomy" to designate an opposition that reaches across all dimensions of life. This dichotomy between the positive and the negative, to use another favorite expression of Hisamatsu, includes the "onto-existential" pair of being and non-being, the "axio-logical" pair of good and evil, the beautiful and the unbeautiful in aesthetics, and the true and untrue in cognition.

For Hisamatsu's Zen, this conflation of vastly different forms of duality and opposition, typical of the influence of Taoism,<sup>41</sup> means that there is no aspect of reality that can be unequivocally grasped by human life or action, no safe haven at all where one is free from the counter-effects of antagonism and opposition. Hisamatsu seems to be exclusively concerned with the struggles created by the inevitable presence of an opposing entity for each existing entity, e.g., evil opposing good. He does not show any interest for a yin-yang type complementarity of opposites. All attempts to balance out the "relative contradictions" of existence or to solve them while maintaining them can only lead to unsatisfactory, partial, and temporary solutions in his eyes. Hence, the only solution is to go through the Great Doubt of radical questioning of all aspects of existence, leading to the Great Awakening of the Formless Self. Thus, Hisamatsu jumps from a rejection of everyday reality that goes well beyond Tillich's own denial of its legitimacy to a Great Affirmation that goes even

further beyond anything that Tillich could accept or even fathom—the absolute tranquility of full detachment, reached in the blinking of an eye.

When Hisamatsu speaks of what is attained through the Great Awakening that puts an end to our existence of conflict and pain, his words remain, predictably, very paradoxical, since they bring together what words can't bring together. But in that, he is no different from the Zen masters of the past (e.g., Dōgen) or his contemporaries from the Kyoto School. Neither is he really any different from the ancient Indian thinker Nagarjuna:

For Nagarjuna, the insight of apprehension of the emptiness of things is the wisdom of 'seeing things as they really are,' namely, in the *Suchness* or *Thusness* which is beyond all descriptions and distinctions between subject and object, and between reality and non-reality.<sup>42</sup>

What makes Hisamatsu's (and other Zen masters') statements particularly difficult to comprehend for the Cartesian mind is that the transcendence of every form of dichotomy is not only expressed in a negative way (beyond being and non-being) but also in a positive way (being and non-being *at the same time*). It seems like all the oppositions and contradictions that are source of pain in the everyday world find themselves again in the state of nirvana (*samsara sive nirvana*), only that the contradiction is no longer contradiction and the opposition is no longer opposition. Contraries coexist in one point that is beyond space and time, beyond existence and non-existence, and so on, the Formless Self. This "Formless Self is at once one's own and not one's own. It is and it is not."<sup>43</sup> We are in a realm where none of the usual laws apply and where our intellect is powerless—in fact, obliterated.<sup>44</sup>

##### **(b) The Formless Self**

As explained early on in the first dialogue, the *Formless Self*<sup>45</sup> is Hisamatsu's own formulation of what in Zen is more commonly designated as "No-Mind" or "No-Consciousness." Occasionally, he would also call it the Calm Self or the True Self, terms that express its qualities. It immediately appears that, in this, Hisamatsu comes down on the side of affirmation, rather than negation in his evaluation of *sūnyatā*,<sup>46</sup> since the expression "Formless Self" is only negative through the suffix *-less*, whereas Self is an affirmation not found in "No-Mind" or "No-Consciousness." The very fact of choosing an expression containing "self" might be construed as a departure from the original Buddhist

view, but it also reminds one that “self” has a vastly different meaning in East and West. At the same time, it hints at the possibility of a convergence, since Hisamatsu describes the Formless Self in a way that is meant to be faithful to Buddhism and, one hopes, acceptable to a Christian thinker like Tillich.

According to Kitaro Nishida, the founder of the Kyoto school, “formless” is as important in Far Eastern thought as form or idea in Western thought:

In contradiction to Western culture which considers form as existence and formation as good, the urge to see the form of the formless, and hear the sound of the soundless, lies at the foundation of Eastern culture.<sup>47</sup>

Out of the formless, every form can arise; therefore it is more important that any given form that comes and goes and will always find its opposite. At least on the surface, there is a clear similarity to the role of the *apeiron* (the indeterminate) in the thought of Anaximander. Contrary to what Tillich suggests, the Formless Self does not “swallow” all forms—it actually gives them their real nature: “It is because of the working of the Self without form that things with form appear. Form is not threatened by the Formless Self; rather it is only because of the free working of the Formless Self that there emerge things with form.”<sup>48</sup> The Formless Self is not abstract—it is the individual things that we identify as such (glass, table) that are abstractions. Things can receive their true identity when apprehended in their “Suchness” through the non-discriminating activity of the Formless Self.

Formless *Self* also clearly expresses that Hisamatsu is not speaking of an “emptiness” or “nothingness” that would somehow be the counterpart to the theistic concept of God. The process of emptying and detachment is an eminently existential one.<sup>49</sup> The Formless Self that emerges through detachment and *satori* belongs to another dimension than the one we are used to, but obviously this does not mean that it belongs to some distant galaxy, as Hisamatsu notes. Nevertheless, he and his translators find themselves immediately at odds with words when trying to describe the “other-dimensional” reality in non-spatial and non-temporal expressions—by using a language that remains inevitably tied to time and space.<sup>50</sup>

### (c) *Metaphysics*

Thus, even though Zen Buddhism is well known for its rejection of metaphysics, its starting point is

profoundly metaphysical, in that it does not seek grounding in our physical or even mental reality. Its grounding is a step into the “wholly other” (in this sense, Otto was certainly right). When Hisamatsu and representatives of Zen make statements about that step, even descriptive ones, it is hard not to see in them metaphysical assertions.<sup>51</sup> And these statements encounter all the difficulties of metaphysical statements, even though they are not meant to logically explain anything about that “other” reality. They are still a discourse on that reality, a reality that is beyond discourse. The metaphysical dimension of the discourse is confirmed by Hisamatsu’s insistence that what he speaks about is neither a new “psychological awareness” nor a mere “state of mind.”<sup>52</sup> It is the Awakening to the Formless Self in which the seer and the seen are one and the same (there is a long discussion on art). The Formless Self, which is both one’s own and not one’s own, is what everyone should awake to, but unfortunately does not.

From this perspective, the paradox thus remains a surface phenomenon—it is the way the Suchness of things is expressed in everyday dualistic language. Paradoxical statements are dramatic means of testifying to that state of things. They show that the breakthrough into the reality of the Formless Self leads into a realm where ordinary language cannot be applied effectively and, by their impact on the mind, they suggest what lies below the surface. They also give a hint that might lead the listener to eventual Enlightenment and real understanding.

## (5) **Tillich: Irreducible Paradox and Dialectic**

### (a) *The nature of paradox*

Tillich’s background is, of course, vastly different from Hisamatsu’s. It is not that obvious fact, but rather the partial convergence between his views and those of Zen that deserved to be highlighted, which has been done above. In the dialogues, direct references to Tillich’s own thought are limited to occasional questions by Hisamatsu, destined essentially to make sure that he had understood Tillich properly, and the response is usually affirmative. The opposite is not always the case. The main reason for Tillich’s difficulties appears to be the fact that his own strong views remain as an insurmountable obstacle not only to agreement but, on occasion, to insight as well.

Since Tillich’s position is not extensively explained in the three dialogues, it is necessary to refer to his earlier positions on the key themes involved if

one is to have more than a marginal chance to understand the exchange properly. Tillich's position is best summed up in his 1922 lecture on *The Conquest of the Concept of Religion*. Like Hisamatsu's statement on the universality of dichotomy quoted above, this passage links the various realms of human life and explains how the notion of paradox applies to them. But the orientation, and hence, the conclusion, are significantly different.

Tillich explains that a paradox can be either the product of "artistic imagination," i.e., it is an ingenious, intriguing, or enigmatic formulation meant to highlight a key point through "ambiguous and contradictory verbal formulation" or it can be of a logical nature, where "it refers to the tension of two patterns of thought which are contradictory, though in themselves consistent and necessary." Both are a function of the subject's mind and can be solved with common sense and logical thinking.

But, Tillich adds, there is a third type of paradox:

...a point where paradox is grounded completely in the object rather than in the subject, where paradox is as necessary to every assertion...the point at which the Unconditional becomes an Object. The fact that it becomes an object is indeed the primal paradox, since by its nature the Unconditional stands beyond the antithesis of subject and object. Thus, every statement about the Unconditional is necessarily in the form of a paradox...The paradox of the Unconditional is not resolvable. It poses a problem that calls for intuition (*Schauen*).<sup>53</sup>

Unlike Hisamatsu, Tillich speaks of *paradox*, not contradiction. Tillich is not disturbed like Hisamatsu by the presence of non-truth next to truth. However, there is one ultimate paradox that can never be solved, because it is located in the Unconditioned, the Absolute, or Being (God), that cannot be an object (it is beyond subject and object) and yet can only be grasped by our mind when it is made into an object of thought. It is to be noted that the paradox is viewed by Tillich as affecting *statements* about the Unconditioned, not the Unconditioned itself. This nevertheless means that for us, paradox is inevitably involved in relating to that Unconditioned.

Thus, the paradoxical statements by Hisamatsu that hint at a total dissolution of the very opposition they state annoy Tillich considerably. He does not see their point or their validity and dismisses them as word plays. The reasons for Tillich's fundamental

disagreement (though occasionally one gets the feeling that he *wishes* he could agree) can be found in the double background of his spiritual, academic, and personal life. The starting points of Tillich's *Weltanschauung* are Christian faith and rational Western philosophy, exemplified by the direct influences of Martin Luther and Immanuel Kant respectively. This leads us to at least two elements of irresolvable paradox in Tillich's thought: a philosophical one and a Christian-existential one, both closely related.

### (b) *Philosophy of religion*

In his early years, Tillich was very much concerned with reconciling the "substance" of religious experience with the contemporary secular worldview. The obstacle to that undertaking he saw in the paradoxical relationship between being and thinking. "Paradox means that thinking is forced to affirm something [being] that contradicts its own form."<sup>54</sup>

In the elaboration of his *critical-intuitive* or *metalogical method* in his early years at Berlin, Tillich brings these two elements together, but sees their convergence as an irremediably paradoxical one. Reason can and will never reduce Being to its own rules and has to capitulate. Only intuition can go further. On the other hand, faith cannot reject as invalid the questions and challenges of reason either. The only solution to this dilemma will be for reason to seek an approximation in attempting to account for Being through symbols that are as appropriate as possible. Through continuous refinement and breaking points, one can thus approach a situation where both faith and reason converge, but the actual meeting point will always remain on the infinite horizon.

In his 1920 lecture on the philosophy of religion, Tillich offers a "platonic myth" where a stone, by its very existence, challenges thought. Thought responds to the challenge by declaring the stone a mere object of its thinking activity. But then, says Tillich, thought feels lonely and miserable in its victory—it has lost the very thing that it was longing for, being, the thing that also irritated it by its presence.<sup>55</sup> This is a clear reference to Otto's *mysterium tremendum and fascinans*.<sup>56</sup> Towards the end of his 1920 lecture, Tillich concludes: "Religion is the function of consciousness or function of the phenomenal world in which thinking experiences its relationship to mere being in its double aspect of terror and bliss (*Grauensvolles und Beseligendes*)."<sup>57</sup>

With this, we leave the realm of mere philosophy, be it philosophy of religion.

**(c) *Good and evil—sin and guilt***

For Tillich, the *mysterium* or “mystery” (which has become a common code word for God in contemporary theology) faces humans of all ages and all cultures as the supreme reality that is both attractive (offering us what cannot be found in this world) and scary, because totally beyond our control and source of judgment. In terms of Christian theology, this is, of course, the God of judgment and grace, sin and salvation.

Tillich’s incredulous response to Hisamatsu’s absolute claim quoted above comes with an explanation, and it is not related to cognition or aesthetics, but to that precise question of sin: “Dr. Hisamatsu seems, then, to be at *a point that has nothing to do with sin or guilt* (emphasis added).”<sup>58</sup> The total liberation *hic et nunc* announced by Hisamatsu is not even conceivable as a theoretical possibility from Tillich’s Christian perspective.<sup>59</sup> Tillich’s wife Hannah, who participated in the three encounters with Hisamatsu, offers this description of Tillich by a Japanese Zen master: “Not one of the enlightened yet,” because “he still made the distinction between ‘good’ and ‘evil.’”<sup>60</sup>

Interestingly, when Hisamatsu makes the statement that, from the Zen perspective, the awakened one should be able to say, “I am the ultimate,” his main translator, De Martino, agrees with Tillich that he too would be shy to make such a statement “as of this moment.”<sup>61</sup> Apparently, De Martino’s theistic background stands in his way. Hisamatsu, on the contrary, insists that Buddha-hood or Christ-nature should not be limited to one special, divine individual and that all humans have the potential to become the ultimate beyond any notion of good and evil:

Non-dualistic ultimacy does not—and should not—make one hesitant to proclaim that one is oneself ‘ultimate.’ The sort of ultimacy that might cause such a reluctance most likely involves the judgment of good and evil.<sup>62</sup>

But, for both, the question of evil or sin and the way to overcome it are related to the notion of a fall into *finitude*. This makes Tillich’s position unorthodox from a Christian perspective and represents a fascinating theme of its own, but one that cannot be further explored here. What deserves to be noted is the fact that, for Tillich, sin and evil involve the notion, and even more the experience, of judgment

by a “wholly other” ultimate that is more than just a new dimension of one’s self.

This all leads us quite naturally to the underlying issue of the entire discussion: is there anything comparable between the ultimate in Christian theism, even Tillich’s unconventional one, and the Zen notion of the ultimate as Formless Self? Is Tillich’s optimistic assessment that Buddhism’s notion of emptiness is a non-hypostasized equivalent of God, or pure *Gehalt*, warranted? If the question of evil, hence judgment by an Ultimate, makes it doubtful, so does the question of the particular, through which the individual participates in that Ultimate, or incarnates it.

**(d) *The Issue of the Particular***

Out of all the questions discussed during the three-part dialogue between Tillich and Hisamatsu, it is the apparently technical issue of the *particular* that forms the surprising culminating point and links all other points to the question of the Ultimate’s nature.

After repeated, unfruitful attempts to reach a conclusion, the question comes up a last time in the third dialogue, at which point Tillich has a memorable *cris-du-coeur*. He expresses his inability to comprehend, much less agree:

Dr. Hisamatsu seems, then, to be at a point that has nothing to do with sin or guilt. On this issue *of the particular* there is apparently a profound difference between us. What I would like to comprehend is how his position is even possible.<sup>63</sup>

The problem arises when Hisamatsu speaks of the transition from the world of everyday reality, where each particular individual finds itself in opposition of some sort with other items, to the world of Enlightenment, where there is no such opposition.<sup>64</sup>

We need to remember that, for Hisamatsu, it is the *concept* of being that necessarily implies non-being.<sup>65</sup> It is the analytical approach that, so to speak, creates dual opposition where there is none.

For Tillich, the disappearance of the duality implies the disappearance of the particular self, which Hisamatsu strenuously denies—to no avail. When Tillich objects that, transcendent and timeless as it may be, Enlightenment happens at a moment in time and space, and that it happens to a particular individual, e.g., Hisamatsu, and not to Hitler or a shoemaker, De Martino’s predictable response is that “considered from the perspective of time-and-space, the Awakening may seem to take place in time-and-

space. But considered from the perspective of the Awakening-in-itself, it is neither conditioned nor restricted by either time or space.”<sup>66</sup> To which Tillich responds: “Then it cannot happen to a human being.”

### **i. The universal and the particular**

Tillich, who is used to think in terms of universals and particulars, sees this as the disappearance of the particular, “swallowed” by the Formless Self. In his third Bampton lecture, held a few years later, Tillich ends along the same lines: “*Only* if each person has a substance of his own is community possible, for community presupposes separation. You, Buddhist friends, have identity, but not community.”<sup>67</sup>

Whether Tillich is right in this evaluation or not, it is certainly on this point that he has the greatest difficulties grasping Hisamatsu’s thought. When Hisamatsu indicates that, for the Formless Self, the flower and the one who sees the flower are one and the same, Tillich dismisses the statement as a paradoxical “way of speaking.” From his comment in the Bampton lectures, a few years later, it appears that he came to take the Zen position more seriously, while still seeing it as problematic. That position will now be examined.

### **ii. Non-obstruction between particular and particular**

Hisamatsu explains that, far from removing the identity of the particular, the Awakening to the Formless Self gives particulars their true reality: “Ordinary individuals are unfulfilled, isolated, or disintegrated, and cannot be regarded as ‘authentic individuals.’ Authentic individuals as understood in Zen Buddhism may be explained in the...concept of *jiji-muge* [事事無礙] (the non-obstruction between particular and particular)...or *koko-enjo* (each individual fulfilled).”<sup>68</sup>

“Non-obstruction between particular and particular” means that, for the Formless Self, things are immediately apprehended in their “Suchness” (as what they are), and not through the medium of conceptualization that inevitably makes distinctions and separates. By dropping the analytic-dualistic approach, one does not deny the individuality of the particular, rather one affirms it, but with the immediacy of the experience of oneness or identity between the particulars.<sup>69</sup>

“Non-obstruction” is a good reminder of the nothingness or emptiness found in the Formless Self,

in spite of its repeatedly emphasized affirmative nature of that Self. Precisely speaking, it shows the affirmative or positive nature of that very emptiness, in that emptiness allows for full freedom—it does not stand in the way, hence, “non-obstruction.” But it is not a physical emptiness, one that would merely allow for something to be put somewhere, like an empty room that is free for new furniture. It is an emptiness of the Self that is no longer obstructed by dualistic thinking and ordinary perception. That emptiness allows the already existing reality to be its true Self. In it, the Self is unfettered and gains genuine access to things as they are.

Something is grasped about reality that the Western tradition has a hard time to process, because that tradition is very much entrenched in the rational-analytical dualistic way of thinking. Nishitani observes:

Kant looks on things from the very outset as *objects*; or, to put it the other way around, his standpoint is that of *representation*. In this theoretical philosophy, an objective, representational point of view is presupposed as a constant base. The problem of the thing-in-itself developed, in fact, from the presupposition of such a base.<sup>70</sup>

Needless to say, the observation is not only aimed at Kant—after all he tried to solve the problem—but also at those who preceded and followed him.<sup>71</sup>

With the development of his critical-intuitive or metalogical method, Tillich makes a particularly ambitious attempt to overcome this very problem without sacrificing either rational thinking or the immediacy of experience. He also offers an explicit critique of Kant,<sup>72</sup> in spite of his great appreciation for the Kantian revolution, and his words sound strangely familiar to the reader of Nishitani. But his criticism also reveals the whole difference between his outlook and that of Zen. Tillich criticizes Kant for his use of the thing-in-itself, saying that with it Kant reintroduces an objectification of the Ultimate. Even though Kant insists that nothing can be said about the thing-in-itself, the very fact of introducing this terminology implies a wholly rational starting point—on this, Tillich and Nishitani would agree.<sup>73</sup> However, Tillich’s critique is aimed at Kant’s *mode* of approaching the question of the unconditioned element that must be “behind” phenomena. Tillich, far from denying that unconditional element, makes it his early code word for God, *das Unbedingte*, borrowed straight from Kant. Tillich’s challenge to Kant is that the Unconditioned can only be grasped when the critical function of the mind is combined



with *intuition*. The issue thus is the relationship to the Unconditioned.

For Zen, and this is Nishitani's entire point, the question of the thing-in-itself does not even arise, because, to the awakened one, there is no thing (object) vs. self (subject), as both are experienced as immediately one.

#### D. Final Assessment

##### (1) *The ontological bottom line*

###### (a) *Communion and identity*

The conclusion of the discussion on the ultimate is thus not unexpected. On one side, there is the challenge of *communion* (between the Ultimate and the self, and among selves); on the other side that of *identity* (between the Ultimate or Formless Self and each self).

For Tillich, the Ultimate inevitably takes the place of object in the cognitive process, though it is beyond subject and object. The Western quest for an intellectual grasp of the Ultimate is destined to fail because of this fundamental paradox. However, the Ultimate remains the Ultimate—infinite and unconditioned—and distinct from the finite self. A non-objectified, non-existing God is, therefore, nevertheless an absolute God for Tillich. To have a paradoxical relationship, you need a relationship, and to have a relationship, you need two: the Ultimate and the Self. Tillich rejects Buddhism's "a = non-a" just as he rejects Hegel's panlogic equivalent of "being = non-being".

In one word, Tillich stands squarely within the Western tradition made of an uneasy but tremendously successful blend between Judeo-Christian theism and dualistic Greek philosophy. In 1920, Tillich compares the statement that  $a = a$ , and the statement that  $a = b$ . The first, for him, amounts to certain but dead identity. The second is less safe and less certain, but it means development and life. The highest mystical speculation, he says, always reaches  $a = a$ , but as soon as this happens, "all life is destroyed."<sup>74</sup> How the lifeless  $a = a$  leads to  $a = b$  is beyond the grasp of reason; it is the mystery of creation.

Next, even though Tillich makes the step to accept that there is potential evil even in the Ultimate, God, for him that evil is only potential. Tillich's position here is very untraditional for a Christian theologian and comes as a great surprise to Hisamatsu. In the end, though, it remains unacceptable to him, because Tillich insists on the potential nature that evil

in God—whose choice is not to actualize it—and because he stresses that evil is a derivative distortion of goodness, rather than its inevitable counterpart.<sup>75</sup> The mere existence of evil and untruth next to goodness and truth does not have the same devastating consequences for Tillich as it does for Zen. God remains as a safe haven of absolute goodness and absolute truth, even though the process of becoming one with that Ultimate can never be completed in this finite world (Tillich speaks of *anticipation*, an expression that of course elicits a negative response from Hisamatsu).

###### (b) *Ground of Being*

If Tillich makes it clear that a particular Self claiming ultimacy—and not just participation in the ultimate—is unacceptable, Hisamatsu makes it equally clear that the notion of a ground of being, or whatever other expression is used to replace the classic notion of causal Being or Creator, is unacceptable to his Zen philosophy, because it leads back to dualism. Hisamatsu introduces Eckhart's notions of *Abgeschiedenheit* (which Tillich translates as separateness) and links it to the Zen notion of *detachment*. He also brings up Eckhart's expression of *Urgrund* (ultimate ground).<sup>76</sup> But he stresses that if *Urgrund* means a divine abyss (*Abgrund*) from which all things with a finite form emerge, that still leaves duality. For Zen, the *Urgrund* should be the Self. Thus, even the most Zen-like Christian mystic is suspected to diverge from Zen on the most essential point of all.<sup>77</sup> The ultimacy of the Formless Self is so essential to Hisamatsu, because with it all potential for tension and paradox disappear for good.

###### (c) *The wholly other: neither tremendum nor fascinans—or even mysterium*

If we now turn to Otto's contention (shared by Tillich) that the non-being of Buddhism is a mere formulation of the "wholly other" and thus corresponds to being on an experiential level, the limits of that astute observation appear at once. In Zen, nothingness may indeed transcend both regular being and non-being and amount to a Great Affirmation, but it is one that is neither *tremendum* nor *fascinans* nor even a *mysterium*—quite the contrary. The Enlightenment of *śūnyatā* removes any sense of mystery, since it means direct contact with the Self. It removes the fear and insecurity created by dual opposition, and it leaves no room for desire or fascination. Nothing perhaps better shows how the basic

attitudes of Buddhism and theism hint at a very different experience of *Gehalt*. What that *Gehalt* actually is lies beyond our consideration.

#### (d) *Art*

This quiet, but pervasive, ontological difference underlying the whole exchange between Tillich and Hisamatsu even appears in the discussion on art. Both use the term *expressionism* to describe what they consider the highest form of art. Tillich has in mind early 20<sup>th</sup> century German expressionism and its often brutal expression of the struggle of life (he also mentions Picasso's *Guernica*, which Hisamatsu particularly dislikes for its "noisy" nature). By expressionism, Hisamatsu means Zen art and its capacity to evoke detachment and profound quietude. Even Paul Klee's painting of a fish surrounded by semi-abstract motives only elicits partial approval from Hisamatsu who still finds the dark setting of the painting scary. Zen art does make use of darkness, but it is a quiet, peaceful darkness, not a threatening one.<sup>78</sup>

### (2) *Mutual attraction*

#### (a) *Zen longing for the West*

Kant is famous for reducing the entire philosophical undertaking to three questions: what is, what should be, and what one can hope for. After discussing the first two from the respective perspectives of Tillich and Zen, it might be good to give a thought to the third question.

Hisamatsu well represents a longing that is common to much of contemporary Japanese philosophy, notably his colleagues of the Kyoto School. This particular longing is not an existential one. It is a fascination with the success of Western philosophy, especially 19<sup>th</sup> century dialectic and 20<sup>th</sup> century existentialism, in formulating the existential distress of modern life. In spite of their critical evaluation of that Western thought, thinkers like Kitaro Nishida, Keiji Nishitani, Daisetz Suzuki, and Shin'ichi Hisamatsu are not only desirous to spread the practice of Zen beyond the shores of Japan, they are also attracted by the West. They have been intellectually trained in Western thought, particularly German philosophy. (Nishitani, for instance, has been a student of Heidegger). Therefore, in their writings, one can easily detect an effort to use the Hegelian and existentialist "newspeak" in formulating their own religious philosophy.

We find a case in point in Masao Abe's attempt to show the dialectical character of *śūnyatā*:

This dialectical structure of *Sūnyata* may be logically explained as follows: since *Sūnyata* is realized not only by negating the 'eternalist' view but also by negating the 'nihilistic' view, which negates the former, it is not based on a mere negation but on the negation of negation. This double negation is not a relative negation but an absolute negation. And an absolute negation is nothing but an absolute affirmation. Thus we may say that absolute negation is absolute affirmation and absolute affirmation is absolute negation. This paradoxical statement well expresses the dialectical and dynamic structure of *Sūnyata* in which emptiness is fullness and fullness is emptiness.<sup>79</sup>

This obvious reference to the Hegelian-Marxist dialectic and the effort to squeeze Zen into its parameters is a good example of what was just said. But though it offers an interesting new perspective, it will nevertheless leave many readers unsatisfied.<sup>80</sup> Given the very self-understanding of Zen, some would probably consider the attempted synthesis to be against nature.

#### (b) *Tillich's nostalgia for Far Eastern peace*

Tillich's own interest in Zen is fairly easy to explain. Though Tillich's nature and orientation are far remote from the dispassionate stance of Buddhism and more particularly Zen, it is no surprise that this religious tradition captured his attention. First, even though Buddhism plays a modest role in Tillich's early philosophy of religion, what he says about it is revealing of a profound fascination because Buddhism makes it its central aim to avoid any objectification of the divine. In Buddhism, says Tillich, "forms are there in order to be overcome."<sup>81</sup> That makes Buddhism an objective ally of Tillich's philosophy of religion. But, more than that, Buddhism promises what has eluded Tillich throughout his life, internal peace. The very beginning of the three dialogues consists of an exchange where Tillich expresses his sense of a need for what amounts to Zen's objectless concentration, because the faculty to focus his mind on a specific goal in the midst of modern-day brouhaha, useful as it is, no longer satisfies him on a deeper level.

Tillich was a passionate man and, as such, he suffered the pain of his passions. The wish to find the peace that accompanies the dispassionate stance of Zen—without abandoning his passion altogether—finally led him to ask the somewhat puzzling question: what about being *freely attached*?<sup>82</sup>

Hisamatsu's reply is of course that freedom comes with detachment and is incompatible with attachment. But Tillich's question was more than a *bon mot* or a sign of naivety. It clearly was a wish.

The fact that both sides, in spite of their strong positions, felt themselves drawn to each other in such a way is a sign more powerful than any ontological analysis that an interface was waiting to be explored for mutual enrichment.

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<sup>1</sup> Shin'ichi Hisamatsu and Paul Tillich, "Dialogues, East and West. Conversations between Dr. Paul Tillich and Dr. Hisamatsu Shin'ichi." [1957] In: Paul Tillich, *The Encounter of Religions and Quasi-Religions* (Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 75-170.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Tillich, "Religionsphilosophie (1920)," in: *Berliner Vorlesungen I (1919-1920). Ergänzungs- und Nachlassbände zu den gesammelten Werken von Paul Tillich*. Band XII (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2000), 555-556 (My translation throughout).

<sup>3</sup> Here, we will not be entering the complex question of how real the "atheism" of Buddhism is in view of the great variety of developments since its early beginnings. Tillich's understanding certainly applies to Zen Buddhism, which will be mainly discussed here.

<sup>4</sup> It is to be noted that Tillich makes a clear distinction between *Inhalt* (content) and *Gehalt*. The latter is often translated as "substance", even though this German expression is as impossible to adequately translate as the similar *Gestalt*. Both the more common *Inhalt* and *Gehalt* imply something that is included, or "held" within (*-halt*). *Inhalt* or content, however, is what is simply used to fill a pre-existing form that determines it, just as the Aristotelian matter is determined by form. *Gehalt*, on the contrary, implies that the content is the real substance that gives its being to the form—a form that can never be fully adequate in expressing it. There is thus a reversal of priority between the two. For Tillich, *Gehalt* represents the non-rational being of all things (the quality of just being there), which forms the counterpart to their rational form.

<sup>5</sup> Ninian Smart & Steven Konstantine, *Christian Systematic Theology in a World Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 69.

<sup>6</sup> Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (Leopold Klotz Verlag / Gotha, 1926 [1917]. 14. Auflage), p. 38.

<sup>7</sup> Tillich has adopted this explanation: "The nonbeing of negative theology means 'not being anything special,' being beyond every concrete predicate. This nonbeing embraces everything; it means being everything; it is Being itself. The dialectical question of nonbeing was and is

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a problem of affirmative theology." Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 188-189.

<sup>8</sup> Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), p. 138.

<sup>9</sup> 1959 *Festschrift* dedicated to Paul Tillich. Quoted by Hans Waldenfels, *Foundations for a Buddhist-Christian Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980 [1976]), p. 1. Takeuchi nevertheless adds that East and West understand non-being or nothingness in entirely different ways.

<sup>10</sup> Plato, *Parmenides*, in: *Plato, vol. 4* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 195-197. Through this Plato tried to explain motion within 'being'—an absurdity according to the historical Parmenides whom Plato greatly admired—through some sort of mutual limitation or interaction between the ideas of 'being' and 'not-being,' a thing being at the same time what it is, and 'not-being' what it is not.

<sup>11</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, vol. 1, *Monologion* (Toronto: Edwin Mellen Press, 1974), p. 16-17.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, p. 234 ff., *passim*.

<sup>13</sup> The Hisamatsu-Heidegger discussion revolved specifically around the question of art and is practically impossible to find in English. According to Jason Wirth, Hisamatsu received nothing but praise from Heidegger. See: Jason M. Wirth, "Blitzkunst: Towards a Field-Being Conception of Creativity" in: *International Journal for Field-Being*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2006), 35-41.

<sup>14</sup> For an in-depth exploration of this questions, refer to: Robert R. N. Ross, *The Non-Existence of God. Linguistic Paradox in Tillich's Thought* (New York & Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1978).

<sup>15</sup> Paul Tillich, "A Christian-Buddhist Conversation," in: *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions*. Bampton Lecture, Columbia University, 1961 (New York: Columbia University Press), 1963, pp. 53-75. There have been numerous other meetings between Tillich and representatives of Japan's religions and philosophy, both in the USA and in Japan. An example as the transcripts from recordings of two 1960 conversations Tillich had with Buddhist and Christian representatives in Japan, published by Robert W. Wood in *Japanese Religions* (Kyoto), vol. 2, no 2/3, 1961, pp. 48-71. See also Tillich's account of a visit to Japan in Hannah Tillich's second autobiographical publication, *From Place to Place. Travels With Paul Tillich, Travels Without Paul Tillich* (New York, Stein and Day, 1976), pp. 93-115.

<sup>16</sup> Kee Chong Ryu, *Nāgārjuna's Emptiness and Paul Tillich's God: A Comparative Study for the Dialogue be-*

tween Christianity and Buddhism. Ph.D.Thesis, Drew University 1984. Published as: *Dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism. God and emptiness as Interpreted by Paul Tillich and Nagarjuna* (Seoul, Korea: Kyung Suh Won Inc.), 1985.

<sup>17</sup> Yoshinori Takeuchi, "Buddhism and Existentialism: The Dialogue between Oriental and Occidental Thought," in: W. Leibrecht, (ed.), *Religion and Culture: Essays in Honor of Paul Tillich* (New York, 1959), pp. 291-365.

<sup>18</sup> No attempt will be made here to summarize the content of the three loosely structured dialogues and their many recurrent themes. For a good overview, see: Joan Stambaugh, *The Formless Self* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 55-97.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Tillich. "The conquest of the concept of religion in the philosophy of religion" in: *What Is Religion?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 139. [Die Ueberwindung des Religionsbegriffs in der Religionsphilosophie, in: *Kant-Studien*, 27, 1922, 446-469], p. 124, 144.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Tillich, *On the Boundary*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966 [*Auf der Grenze*, 1936]

<sup>22</sup> Carl-Gustav Jung and Shin'ichi Hisamatsu, "The Jung-Hisamatsu Conversation [1958]" in: Polly Young-Eisendrath, and Shoji Muramoto (eds.), *Awakening and Insight. Zen Buddhism and Psychotherapy*. New York: Taylor & Francis, 2002, p 112.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Tillich, "Religionsphilosophie (1920)," pp. 338, 345-346, passim.

<sup>24</sup> *Tillich-Hisamatsu Dialogues*, p. 133.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Tillich, "Religionsphilosophie (1920)," p. 407.

<sup>26</sup> Paul Tillich, "The Conquest of the philosophy of religion," in *What is Religion?* p. 139.

<sup>27</sup> The German noun *das Unbedingte* has been translated as either the "Unconditioned" or the "Unconditional" by Tillich's classic translator, James Luther Adams. Tillich used the Unconditional in his American period. I have maintained *Unconditional* when quoting translations that use this form and chosen *Unconditioned* in all other cases.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Tillich, "A Christian-Buddhist Conversation." In: *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions*. Bampton Lectures, Columbia University, 1961 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), pp. 12, 24-25, 62.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Tillich, "The Conquest of the philosophy of religion," in *What is Religion?* p. 125.

<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, Paul Tillich, "Religionsphilosophie (1920), pp. 338-339 (1<sup>st</sup> lecture).

<sup>31</sup> *Tillich-Hisamatsu Dialogues*, p. 81.

<sup>32</sup> *Tillich-Hisamatsu Dialogues*, p. 85-86.

<sup>33</sup> In his third Bampton Lecture (p. 67), Tillich notes that "the *esse ipsum*, Being itself, of the classical Christian doctrine of God, is a transpersonal category and allows the Christian disputant to understand the meaning of absolute nothingness of Buddhist thought. The term points to the unconditional and infinite character of the Ultimate..."

<sup>34</sup> Newman Robert Glass, "The Formless Self (review)." *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 24 (2004), pp. 300-303. University of Hawai'i Press. For a similar critical assessment of Tillich's ability to understand Zen, see Joan Stambaugh, *The Formless Self* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 55-97. Both authors primarily aim at Tillich's perceived difficulties in understanding the paradoxical thought of Zen from the perspective of his western thinking in terms of universals and particulars (see below).

<sup>35</sup> Dr. Richard de Martino, from Temple University in Philadelphia, was himself an accomplished scholar who published together with D.T. Suzuki, Erich Fromm and Masao Abe. He had also been Tillich's student.

<sup>36</sup> *Tillich-Hisamatsu Dialogues*, p. 169 (third dialogue). Earlier on in the dialogue, De Martino had suggested that Dr. Tillich was "ready for more..." (p. 149). He finally concluded that his inadequate translation might be to blame for Hisamatsu's inability or unwillingness to engage Tillich in a "non-verbal manner." But a careful reading of the transcript does not leave that impression. Hisamatsu's response was deliberate, following an extensive exchange that cannot have left any doubts about Tillich's state of mind and his expectations.

<sup>37</sup> *Tillich-Hisamatsu Dialogues*, p. 149. Tillich's candid *cris du coeur* stands in contrast to Hisamatsu's much more self-assured and matter-of-fact reply earlier on in the conversation, when dealing with the same topic: "It is not that you cannot maintain your position, it is more that we are unable to accept your position." This self-assurance, along with Zen's appearance on the Western scene in the 1960s might explain Tillich's otherwise surprising characterization of Buddhism as a "most competitive" religion in his 3<sup>rd</sup> Bampton Lecture (p. 54).

<sup>38</sup> Shin'ichi Hisamatsu and Carl-Gustav Jung, "The Jung-Hisamatsu Conversation" in: Young-Eisendrath, Polly and Muramoto, Shoji (eds.). *Awakening and Insight. Zen Buddhism and Psychotherapy*. New York: Taylor & Francis, 2002, p. 115.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119, Note 8.

<sup>40</sup> *Tillich-Hisamatsu Dialogues*, p. 117.

<sup>41</sup> Below, we will see how Tillich challenges the treatment of good and evil as a pair of correlative ele-

ments standing on a same footing, as in white vs. black, day vs. night.

<sup>42</sup> Ryu, p. 156.

<sup>43</sup> *Tillich-Hisamatsu Dialogues*, p. 92.

<sup>44</sup> On this point, the Zen approach is not without similarities with German Idealism and Romanticism and their emphasis on the difference between *Verstand* (understanding) and *Vernunft* (reason), the former referring to the grasping of reality in the form of discrete entities, never succeeding in grasping the reality of the whole or its ultimate meaning, the latter referring to the wisdom of true reason, which is capable of transcending this analytical approach. But Zen's approach is much less intellectual.

<sup>45</sup> The original Japanese expression translated as Formless Self never appears in the published version of the dialogues. It is: 無相無状 (musou no jiko). A more casual form, carrying the exact same meaning is sometimes also used in the literature: 空相無状 (katachi na ki jiko). Both expressions correspond quite literally to the English translation used by Hisamatsu and his translators.

<sup>46</sup> A term he actually does not use.

<sup>47</sup> Kitaro Nishida, quoted by Jan Van Bragt in his introduction to Nishitani's *Religion and Nothingness*, p. xxv.

<sup>48</sup> *Tillich-Hisamatsu Dialogues*, p. 89.

<sup>49</sup> Hisamatsu here compares the Zen approach with that of Meister Eckhart. The exchange is inconclusive as to the extent of the similarity between the two—the typical result of any discussion on Western vs. Eastern mysticism.

<sup>50</sup> *Tillich-Hisamatsu Dialogues*, pp. 80 ff.

<sup>51</sup> See, for instance, pp. 16-17: “[The] Formless Self is at once one's own and not one's own. It is and it is not.”

<sup>52</sup> *Tillich-Hisamatsu Dialogues*, pp. 79 ff.

<sup>53</sup> Paul Tillich, „Die Überwindung des Religionsbegriffs in der Religionsphilosophie”, in: *Kant-Studien*, 27, 1922, 446-469. English: Paul Tillich, *What Is Religion?* New York: Harper & Row, 1969, pp. 122-123.

<sup>54</sup> Paul Tillich, “Religionsphilosophie (1920),” p. 524.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, p. 400.

<sup>56</sup> In reference to Rudolf Otto's numinous, Tillich indicates in 1923 that, besides the “mystery of depth” (*Mysterium des Grundes*) there is also the mystery of light and that both are equally unconditioned and irreducible to one another. Both are equally legitimate. Paul Tillich, “Die Kategorie des ‘Heiligen’ bei Rudolf Otto (1923).” In: *Begegnungen. Paul Tillich über sich selbst und andere. Gesammelte Werke, Band XII* (Evangelisches Verlagswerk Stuttgart, 1971), pp. 184-186.

<sup>57</sup> Paul Tillich, “Religionsphilosophie (1920),” p. 522

<sup>58</sup> *Tillich-Hisamatsu Dialogues*, p. 149.

<sup>59</sup> Again, for Tillich, the paradox is not a starting point that can be overcome—it is the core of reality. Christianity, the religion of the cross with the Savior who denies his own affirmation to the point of death is the highest religion because it most fully accounts for the paradoxical nature of reality. It is the religion of paradox, as expressed in the Bible's own paradoxical passages, such as “the first will be the last” and “those who want to lose their life will save it and those who want to save their life will lose it.” In a June 7, 1960 encounter with Japanese Christians, Tillich explicitly, even bluntly indicates that, on this point, Zen runs the considerable danger of elevating the self above its natural limitations, as a form of self-aggrandizement—a comment that is made in reference to another discussion with Hisamatsu. Tillich also makes the comparison with the danger of demonic *hybris* in Catholic monasticism. See *Japanese Religions* (Kyoto), vol. 2, no 2/3, 1961, p. 59.

<sup>60</sup> Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time* (New York: Stein & Day, 1973), p. 24. One need not take Hannah Tillich's description entirely at face value to find it largely credible.

<sup>61</sup> *Tillich-Hisamatsu Dialogues*, p. 159.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>63</sup> *Tillich-Hisamatsu Dialogues*, p. 149.

<sup>64</sup> Daisetz Suzuki expresses this phenomenon very well: “Satori may be defined as an intuitive looking into the nature of things in contradiction to the analytical or logical understanding of it. Practically, it means the unfolding of a new world hitherto unperceived in the confusion of a dualistically-trained mind....Logically stated all its [the old world's] opposites and contradictions are united and harmonized into a consistent and organic whole. This is a mystery and a miracle ... being performed every day. Satori can thus be had only through our own personal experience of it.” D.T. Suzuki, “Satori or Enlightenment” in *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D.T. Suzuki*. William Barrett (ed.), 1956. Quoted by: Gary E. Kessler, *Philosophy of Religion—Toward a Global Perspective* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1999), p. 178.

<sup>65</sup> *Tillich-Hisamatsu Dialogues*, p. 116. Suzuki's description naturally brings to mind the often observed similarity between Buddhist Enlightenment and the Christian experience of Rebirth, a similarity that is more an equivalence of function than a similarity of substance. The Enlightenment of Satori also brings to mind the Christian notion of Revelation, in which the human spirit bypasses reason by intuitively “receiving” the divine. However, Tillich makes no use of the notion of Revelation in his

dialogue with Hisamatsu and we will limit our discussion to the notion of Enlightenment.

<sup>66</sup> *Tillich-Hisamatsu Dialogues*, p. 126.

<sup>67</sup> Paul Tillich, "A Christian-Buddhist Conversation." In: *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions*. Bampton Lectures, Columbia University, 1961 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 75. A practically identical dialogue appears in Hannah Tillich's *From Place to Place* (p. 101), where it is presented as a dialogue between Tillich himself and a Japanese representative of Pure Land Buddhism. Tillich uses the concept of *participation* to describe the particular's relationship to the Ultimate, but he insists: "[Mystical realism] is wrong if it establishes a second reality behind empirical reality and makes of the structure of participation a level of being in which individuality and personality disappear" Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, p. 178.

<sup>68</sup> *Tillich-Hisamatsu Dialogues*, p. 143.

<sup>69</sup> One is reminded of Edmund Husserl's phenomenological approach and its effort to grasp things (e.g., redness) before analyzing them.

<sup>70</sup> Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, p. 133.

<sup>71</sup> This tendency of Western thought, Nishitani continues, has never been entirely overcome, even by those thinkers who strived to overcome it. With his *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche for instance seems to stand squarely within the position of Zen, but there is still the notion of a "something" beyond which one needs to go. According to Nishitani, It is not a pure existential step. Hence, according to Nishitani, that trend of thought results in nihilism, rather than in the positive Zen notion of nihility or emptiness.

<sup>72</sup> Notably in the first ten hours of his "Religionsphilosophie (1920)."

<sup>73</sup> In his 1920 Lecture (p. 507), Tillich states that even the high point of European mysticism (Plotinus) remains too much linked to form. The West, he says "makes a system even out of mysticism." This is not the case in India, where the *Gehalt* is grasped as what is essential to the point that form no longer plays a role. Western mysticism is "the result of a rational history of philosophy. The mystical principle is the last abstraction of the knowledge of the world going beyond itself."

<sup>74</sup> Paul Tillich, "Religionsphilosophie (1920)," 394-395. Tillich reemphasizes this point in his encounter with Hisamatsu (pp. 115-116) when he states that "Pure being would be death."

<sup>75</sup> *Tillich-Hisamatsu Dialogues*, p. 116 ff.

<sup>76</sup> Hisamatsu brings up the expression of *Urgrund* (ultimate ground) and "divine abyss" (*Abgrund*) that Tillich likes to borrow from the medieval mystics and from

Schelling. *Tillich-Hisamatsu Dialogues*, pp. 83 ff. Though "ultimate ground" is probably the best possible translation, it does not do full justice to the emotional weight of any German expression starting with "Ur-", signifying something deeply original and ancient—as far back as one can go, but not just in a spatio-temporal sense. Kant uses *Grund*, the grounding of things, as opposed to their cause, to avoid contradicting his own conclusion that nothing can be known of causes as they are in themselves.

<sup>77</sup> Nishitani's evaluation of Eckhart is much more positive and makes him practically into an adept of Zen. Not only the Self, but also God reaches absolute nothingness before being reborn together in the soul of man (like Tillich, Nishitani refers to Eckhart's "God beyond God"). The soul is not in communion or union with God, it is one with him. That experience of the total identity between the divine and the human has also appeared sporadically in such an unlike environment as that of Islam, which supports the claim that there is a potential for a coming together of all human traditions.

<sup>78</sup> The German language, interestingly, uses *Dunkelheit* to express a positive, peaceful darkness, and *Finsternis* to express a scary type of darkness, a distinction that comes very close to that between the two types of darkness introduced by Hisamatsu.

<sup>79</sup> Ryu, p. 162.

<sup>80</sup> In the Hegelian dialectic, the affirmation is negated, after which the negation itself is negated. This negation of the negation amounts to an affirmation and leads to a dynamic movement through becoming. In Zen, both being and non-being are negated at the same time from a perspective that has nothing to do with either. Explaining the affirmative nature of nothingness by saying that it is negation of negation therefore seems far-fetched at best.

<sup>81</sup> Paul Tillich, "Religionsphilosophie (1920)," 556.

<sup>82</sup> *Tillich-Hisamatsu Dialogues*, p. 136.

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