



BULLETIN

The North American Paul Tillich Society

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For those who have *not* paid their 2010 dues, please remit 50 USD, or 20 USD for students, to the secretary-treasurer as soon as you are able. You may also pay in person at the NAPTS/ AAR meeting in Atlanta. Many thanks.

NAPTS PROGRAM FOR THE ANNUAL MEETING

OVERVIEW

Friday, 29 October 2010

M29-101

Friday, 29 Oct. 2010, 9:00-11:30 AM - Hyatt

Hannover F (Session 1)

M29-202

Friday, 29 Oct 2010, 1:00-3:30 PM - Hyatt
Edgewood (Session 2)

M29-304

Friday, 29 Oct. 2010 4:00-6:30 PM - Hyatt
Auburn (Session 3)

Friday, 29 October 2010, 7:00 – 10:00 PM
Annual Banquet

Saturday, 30 October 2010

M30-2

Saturday, 30 Oct 2010, 7:00-8:00 AM - Marriott
 M109 (NAPTS Board of Directors Meeting)

M30-106

Saturday, 30 Oct 2010, 9:00-11:30 AM - Mar-
 riott International 4 (Session 4)

M30-121

Saturday, 30 Oct 2010, 11:45 AM-12.45 PM -
 Marriott International A (NAPTS
 Annual Business Meeting)

2010 NAPTS ANNUAL MEETING
SESSIONS

SESSION 1:

**Friday, 29 October 2010, 9:00-11:30 AM, Hyatt
 Hannover F**

Tillich and Barth (and Bonhoeffer)

Robison James, University of Richmond emeritus
*Historicizing God à la Tillich and Barth (Both!):
 Formula for Good Theology*

Sven Ensminger, University of Bristol
*"Beyond a disagreement on criteria" – Paul Til-
 lich and Karl Barth on Interreligious Encoun-
 ters*

Christian Danz, University of Vienna
*Religion and Modern Culture. Considerations
 on Theology of Culture of Paul Tillich and Karl
 Barth*

Bruce Rittenhouse
*Self-Affirmation and Self-Denial in the Ethics of
 Paul Tillich and Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

SESSION 2:

**Friday, 29 October 2010, 1:00-3:30 PM, Hyatt
 Edgewood**

Tillich and Interreligious Encounter

Claude Perrottet, University of Bridgeport

*Guide to the Perplexed: An Attempt to Make
 Sense of the Tillich-Hisamatsu Dialogues*

Ivan Hon

*Paul Tillich's Thoughts and the Religiousness of
 Confucianism*

Tim Helton, Drew University

*Finitude in Tillich: Talking Points for Jain-
 Christian Dialog*

Lawrence A Whitney, Boston University

*Mission Theology and Interreligious Encounter:
 1910-2010*

SESSION 3:

**Friday, 29 October 2010, 4:00-6:30 PM, Hyatt
 Auburn**

New Directions in Tillich and Art (and Deleuze!)

David Nikkel, University of North Carolina,
 Pembroke

Updating Tillich on Religion and Art

Russell Re Manning, University of Cambridge

*"A Walk around the Rim of the Deepest Spi-
 ritual Crater in European History:" On the Aes-
 thetics and Theology of Horror and Hope in An-
 selm Kiefer and Paul Tillich*

Jari Ristiniemi, University of Gävle

*Differential Thinking and New Aesthetics; Essen-
 tialization, Potentialization and Art*

John Starkey, Oklahoma City College

Tillich and Deleuze

Annual Banquet of the Society

Friday, 29 October 2010, 7:00 – 10:00

See below for information.

Annual Meeting of the Board of Directors

**Saturday, 30 Oct 2010, 7:00-8:00 AM - Marriott
 M109**

Agenda

- (1) Acceptance of the minutes from the 2009 meeting in Montréal, Québec
 - (2) Report of the President: David Nikkel
 - (3) Report of the Secretary-Treasurer: Frederick J. Parrella
 - (4) Report of the Nominating Committee: Sharon P. Burch, Past President
 - (5) Election of new officers and board members for 2007-2008
 - (6) The Collected Works Project Committee: Report of Mary Ann Stenger
 - (7) NAPTS.org: a Report
 - (8) Topics of future meetings
 - (9) New publications on Tillich
 - (10) Items of business from the floor
 - (11) Thank you to former officers and board members
-

SESSION 4:

Saturday, 30 October 2010, 9:00-11:30 AM, Marriott International 4

Recent Developments in Tillich Scholarship

Jeff Moore, United States Navy
Tillich at the Top of the Spear

Daniel Morris, University of Iowa
Reconsidering Commitment: A Case for Tillich in Studies of Religious Violence

Stephen Butler Murray, Endicott College
Exile, Symbols, and the Courage to Be: The Influence of Paul Tillich on the Womanist Theology of Delores S. Williams

Matthew Tennant
Unity between the Ultimate and Concrete: The Success of Tillich's Trinitarian Theology

Annual Business Meeting of the NAPTS

**Saturday, 30 October 2010, 11:45 AM–12:45 PM
Marriott International A**

David Nikkel, President
Presiding

See agenda from the Board of Directors Meeting above for this meeting. Since the entire Society meets only once a year, please make every effort to attend. Thank you!

**TILlich: ISSUES IN THEOLOGY, RELIGION,
AND CULTURE GROUP**

**Saturday, 30 October, 4:00 PM to 6:30 PM,
Marriott Marquis - L503, A30-328**

Tillich and New Directions in Science and Theology

This exciting session will explore the connections between Paul Tillich's thought and new directions currently being taken in the Science and Theology field. The papers all recognize Tillich as a significant resource for advancing work at the interface of science and theology. Particular papers focus on understandings of the human person in cognitive science, new developments in emergence theory, the Gaia hypothesis and a reinterpretation of Tillich's dialogue with Einstein. A short business meeting will follow the papers.

Sharon Peebles Burch, Interfaith Counseling Center
Presiding

Sam Powell, Point Loma Nazarene University
Tillich's Theology and Cognitive Science: The Prospects for Theological Anthropology

Ryan T. O'Leary, University of Iowa
Being and Gaia: Seeking Resources Toward a Vocabulary for Naturalistic Theology

J. Patrick Woolley, University of Oxford
Tillich's Critique of Einstein and the Struggle with Natural Theology: Geometry of Nature and the Finite-Infinite Relation

Adam Pryor, Graduate Theological Union
Tillichian Teleodynamics: An Examination of the Multidimensional Unity of Emergent Life

**Business Meeting of the AAR Tillich Group
(Immediately following)**

Russell Re Manning, University of Cambridge
Presiding

Tillich: Issues in Theology, Religion, and Culture Group, A31-129

Sunday, 31 October, 9:00 AM to 11:30 AM, Marriott Marquis - L405-406

On Overcoming Dualisms with Paul Tillich: Reconsidering Empire, Secular Reason, Religious Fundamentalism, and Everyday Religious Practices

This exciting session will showcase the intersections between Tillich's thought and contemporary issues in theology, religion and culture. United by a concern to overcome destructive and discriminating dualisms, the papers in this session focus on bringing Tillich's thought into a creative engagement with issues of empire, critiques of secular reason, religious fundamentalisms, and everyday religious practices.

Russell Re Manning, University of Cambridge
Presiding

Jacob J. Erickson, Drew University
The Ambiguity of Power: Paul Tillich, Empire, and the Kingdom of God

Daniel Miller, Syracuse University
Theology versus Secular Reason: The Dualism of Radical Orthodoxy and the Promise of Paul Tillich's Correlational Method

Mary Ann Stenger, University of Louisville
Theologies of Culture as a Base for Interreligious Efforts to Address Fundamentalisms

Justin Rosolino,
"How Do You Get to Carnegie Hall?": A Wittgensteinian Critique of Tillich's Account of the Subject-Object Divide and a Call to Concrete Christian Practices of Agape in the Everyday

Mike Grimshaw, University of Canterbury
Responding

Peachtree Street and Spring Street, within easy walking distance from the convention hotels. It is also a block from the Peachtree Center Station of MARTA, the Atlanta subway line. The distinguished speaker this year will be A. Durwood Foster.

For banquet reservations:

- fparrella@scu.edu
- 408.554.4714 (Office phone at Santa Clara University)
- Text message or voice message to cell phone: 408.674.3108

NEW PUBLICATIONS

O'Meara, Thomas. "Paul Tillich and Karl Rahner: Similarities and Contrasts." *Gregorianum* 91, 3 (2010): 443–450.

[Editor's note: due to an oversight, the following publications were not included in an earlier volume.]

Vahanian, Gabriel. *Tillich and the New Religious Paradigm. Philosophical and Cultural Studies in Religion*. Aurora, Colorado: The Davies Publishing Group, 2004.

Vahanian, Gabriel. *Praise of the Secular*. Charlottesville, Virginia and London: University of Virginia Press, 2008.

Tillich and the New Religious Paradigm represents a creative and radical engagement with the enduring legacy of Tillich's thought, and provides resources for renewing theological reflection in a secular world. The author does not simply survey Tillich's theology; he engages it in a profound intellectual reading that pushes Tillich beyond Tillich. The secular and utopian aspects of Tillich's theology are intensified through a dialectical process of critique and appropriation. Vahanian confronts Tillichian themes of being, *kairos* and the sacred with his own reflections on secularity, holiness and utopia. He takes issue with some of Tillich's own conclusions by spelling out the logic of some of the processes inherent in Tillich's theology. Vahanian shows us what Tillich could look like if pushed to a consistent extreme. This creative engagement with Tillich's theology provides new resources for religious and theological reflection.

During a distinguished tenure as professor of religion at Syracuse University Gabriel Vahanian

ANNUAL BANQUET

The annual banquet of the NAPTS will take place on Friday, October 29, at Pittypat's Porch Restaurant, 25 Andrew Young International Boulevard. 404.525.8228. The restaurant is located between

wrote several landmark books, the most well-known and influential of which was *The Death of God*. His *God and Utopia* (1977) led Jaques Ellul to describe Vahanian as a “true theologian.” In the mid-1980s Vahanian returned to France to teach at the Université des Sciences Humane, Strasbourg, after which most of his publications were in French and inaccessible to a large part of his audience. *Tillich and the New Religious Paradigm* is his first book written in English in several years. In addition to demonstrating the significance of Tillich’s thought for contemporary theology, in *Tillich and the New Religious Paradigm* Vahanian makes accessible once again to a large part of the English-speaking world the profound art of thinking that distinguishes Gabriel Vahanian as a true theologian.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Oct. 4, 2010

Dear Fred,

I love and revere the professor who started me on my Tillich studies at Duke—Durwood Foster—but his letter to the editor in the Spring issue of this Bulletin (36, 2, pp. 1-2) has caused a tumult in my breast. Dare I disappoint him? Dare I let Durwood think that this “brash and brainy Baptist,” as he once called me, has lost the impiety that he must surely expect of me?

I have not lost my impiety. Therefore, upstart that I am, I respectfully disagree with Foster when he says that Tillich, after long defending the position, *gave up* on the idea that the one un-symbolic statement that theologians must make about God is: “God is being-itself”—a statement from 1951 (ST I, 238). Instead, Durwood believes, Tillich switched in 1957 to say that the only such statement is, “everything we say about God is symbolic” (ST II, 9). This switch was especially controversial, Foster adds, “to those who could not imagine Paulus’s ever changing his mind about the structural pilings of the system.”

I am one of those who has argued, not least in my correspondence with Foster, that there were no substantial changes in the structural underpinnings of Tillich’s systematic thought after about 1920, when he formulated his symbol theory (although there were sometimes major shifts in emphases, in terminology, and in the nature of the problems Tillich was addressing).

Perhaps this matter of the “one un-symbolic statement about God” can serve as a test case of

whether Tillich changed his position in anything like a basic way.

(1) I am not aware that Tillich ever again championed precisely his 1957 statement, “everything we say about God is symbolic,” as the theologian’s one un-symbolic statement about God. It was widely criticized. It seemed to be a statement about statements, not about God. But, if somebody took it to *be* a statement about God, then, by its own meaning, it ceased to be un-symbolic, because it says all statements about God are *symbolic*. I believe Tillich should have, and that he likely did, regret this 1957 formulation as a bit of a slip, an inadequate statement of a position that remained unchanged.

(2) Further, it is clear enough—still in 1963 in ST III—that Tillich continued to view his 1951 version of his one un-symbolic statement as the correct one, that is, as “the first (not the last!) statement about God.” He phrases that “first” statement thus: “God is being-itself or the ground of being” (ST III, 294).

(3) Although the 1951 and the 1957 versions of the one un-symbolic statement differ, as Foster says, Tillich’s basic position would remain unchanged if he thought that the later statement is a necessary implication of the earlier one. This Tillich seemed to believe. As he said right after ST I was published, “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” (Paul Tillich in Kegley and Bretall, eds., *The Theology of Paul Tillich* [Macmillan, 1952], 334). I derived this point from Gunther Wenz (*Subjekt und Sein*, 1979), who got it from Lewis S. Ford (JAAR, 178).

(4) Although other considerations could be adduced, I end with what is probably Tillich’s most exact explanation of how things stand on that immensely important boundary where the symbolic and the un-symbolic coincide vis-à-vis God. Unfortunately, this explanation was published only after Tillich’s death. He writes:

The more exact formulation, I think, should be that there is an element in the term ‘God,’ namely, the fact that he is being-itself, which can become a concept if analytically separated, and that there is an element in the term ‘being-itself’ which can become a symbol if analytically separated. In the first case it is the answer to the question ‘What does it mean that God “is”?’ which drives to the concept of being-itself. In the second case, it is the element of mystery in the experience of being (in the sense

of the negation of non-being) that enables it to become a symbol. (Paul Tillich, "Rejoinder," *Journal of Religion*, XLVI, No. 1, Part II [January 1966], 184-85)

On the basis of this explanation I believe we can appreciate: (a) the unchanged consistency of Tillich's position on this issue, despite his varying expressions of it; (b) how "God is being-itself" can be analytically separated out as a conceptual or a non-symbolic statement; and (c) how the grip on reality that is set forth *in* that statement assures us that our live symbols of God *refer to what is real*: they are not a mass of images suspended from nowhere and referring, in a shimmering, infinite circle, to nothing but themselves.

—Rob James, University of Richmond

IN MEMORIAM: A. JAMES REIMER

We are saddened to announce the death of A. James Reimer after a long struggle with cancer. He was 68. Jim was the author of *The Emmanuel Hirsch and Paul Tillich Debate: A Study in the Political Ramifications of Theology*, published by Edward Mellen Press in 1989. He also published *Paul Tillich: Theologian of Nature, Culture and Politics*, LIT Verlag, 2004, and was an editor and contributor of books and articles from the meetings of the Deutsche-Paul-Tillichs-Gesellschaft.

MUTIE TILlich FARRIS: A TRIBUTE TO JANE OWEN

[Editor's Note: Dr. Farris was invited to contribute this remembrance of Mrs. Owen.]

Somehow I never believed that Jane Owen would die. She would be there, I thought, in New Harmony, walking gently, through the gardens she had created, adjusting the stem of a flower, pulling up a weed, exclaiming over all the beauty around her with an almost religious note in her voice. But Jane is gone. What a loss!

No one knows how many people in New Harmony and outside of New Harmony were touched by Jane's caring hands. Jane could sense when someone was in trouble or in need. She was quick and inventive in her responses. And her help was given silently. Few people even knew what she had done.

Jane loved New Harmony. She helped to restore it. By reconstructing some of the fine old buildings, she brought back their original presence. Jane re-

stored but also enhanced. Phillip Johnson's Roofless Church conceived and financed by Jane is an architectural gem, a wonderful place to worship or just to quietly meditate.

Jane took pride in showing her friends the lovely old town that she had helped to restore. And that is how Hannah and Paul Tillich came to New Harmony and how the Paul Tillich Park was born. Jane asked Paul to name the trees he loved the most and, no matter where those trees originate, she procured them and planted them in his park. In the shade of those trees, Jane placed huge rocks carved with Tillich's quotations. It was truly a Paul Tillich Park. But Jane embraced the entire Tillich family. Madeline, Tillich's granddaughter, worked with Jane for two summers in New Harmony. She truly enjoyed these summers. Jane and Madeline valued each other. When Madeline's life was cut short by cancer, Jane placed a memorial plaque for Madeline among a verdant planting of daisies.

When Paul Tillich died in 1965, Hannah Tillich knew that his German relatives wanted him buried in the family plot. Hannah also knew that her husband loved America. After World War II he had deliberately turned down a professorship in Germany. He felt his place was in the United States.

And so Jane Owen generously offered us a burial place in the Paul Tillich Park, which he had dedicated just two years earlier. Thanks to Jane, Paul Tillich now lies at rest beneath the trees he loved, among the rocks that bear his words, in the middle of the country that saved him from Hitler, and gave him a happy and productive life.

Jane had given her ingenious and practical help to so many others. She did much, but she never lost her humor or her gentleness. She was warm, she was truly good, and she is greatly missed.

JANE BLAFFER OWEN: A REMEMBRANCE

In the summer of 1999, I was graciously received by Jane Owen in her home at New Harmony, Indiana, to talk about our mutual interest in Paul Tillich's thought. We were both drawn to Tillich because he understood the relationship of religion and culture. I was concerned about the relationship of religion and politics. Her interest was in the relationship of religion and art. A picture on her wall showed Tillich in an ocean scene with his white hair blowing in the wind. A picture in my home office shows Tillich working at his University of Chicago

desk about the time he became my theological mentor in 1964. I told her about my 35 years' study of Tillich's books and books about Tillich, including his three volumes of *Systematic Theology*, out of concern for politics burdened with religion. She persuaded me to join the North American Paul Tillich Society in spite of my limitations as a self

taught theologian and lack of professional writing skills. We later exchanged letters and talked briefly again in 2004 outside the New Harmony office.

I am eternally grateful to have known Jane Blaffer Owen, a brilliant lady who appreciated my concern for politics burdened with religion.

—JOHN M. PAGE

PANEL RESPONSE TO *ORIGINAL SIN AND EVERYDAY PROTESTANTS: THE THEOLOGY OF REINHOLD NIEBUHR, BILLY GRAHAM, AND PAUL TILLICH* BY ANDREW FINSTUEN

DAN PETERSON

An *easy task* for a critical scholar would be to compare Paul Tillich with Reinhold Niebuhr and affirm their theological similarities. A *slightly harder task* would be to contrast Tillich with Niebuhr to determine their subtle, sometimes more nuanced differences. A *nearly impossible task* would be to take Tillich and Niebuhr, link them with “the undisputed father and leader of modern evangelicalism,” and ultimately identify the three as a “curious trinity,” somehow united in the conviction—to cite a phrase in Tillich’s famous sermon, “You Are Accepted”—that before sin is an act, it is a condition.

Such is the task Andrew Finstuen sets before himself in *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants: The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, Billy Graham, and Paul Tillich*. Finstuen’s thesis—or at least part of his thesis—runs as follows: “when the doctrine of sin is given its proper place as a fundamental element in the thought of [Tillich, Niebuhr, and Graham], the differences [in their thought] can be seen as superficial, not essential. Niebuhr’s prophetic neo-orthodoxy, Graham’s powerful neo-evangelicalism, and Tillich’s sophisticated continental theology all pointed in the same direction: the doctrine of original sin. While their theologies of sin cannot be synthesized, neither can they be easily separated or understood as anything but central to their respective ministries” (67). Tillich, Niebuhr, and Graham, in other words, share in the conviction that sin is original, that “before sin is an act, it is a fact.”

Here those who know something about Niebuhr or Tillich will understandably pause: it is difficult to imagine that this dynamic theological duo would have anything in common with Graham. After all, it was Tillich who once remarked in *The Saturday*

Evening Post that “in spite of [Graham’s] personal integrity, his propagandistic methods and primitive theological fundamentalism fall short of what is needed to give an answer to the questions of our period.” But what if—Tillich’s own words notwithstanding—Finstuen’s assessment is basically correct? What if there exists a deep continuity on the doctrine of sin among Niebuhr, Tillich, and Graham? If correct, such a consensus, as Finstuen points out, would not only challenge “conventional portraits” of Niebuhr and Tillich at odds with Graham at the height of post-war American Protestantism. It would also unite the prophet (Niebuhr), the professor (Tillich), and the preacher (Graham) against a cultural form of religiosity that capitulated to the officially optimistic American philosophy of the time—one that offered “reassurance over redemption,” particularly as espoused by the high priest of positive thinking, Norman Vincent Peale, and one that continues to be heard today in the prosperity gospel of men like Joel Osteen. The implications are significant.

And so we ask: Does Finstuen persuasively argue that Graham, Niebuhr, and Tillich share “a common theological principle,” namely, that “behind every sinful act was the indisputable, universal condition of original sin” (47)? Here—given the limits of time and given that we are discussing this at a meeting of the Tillich Society—I will focus on comparing Tillich with Graham alone. I begin with Finstuen’s presentation of Tillich.

That Tillich’s emphasis on original sin would be overlooked by his critics, Finstuen tells us, centers on two factors—the first of which is most important for our discussion. This factor was Tillich’s reputation as a liberal theologian “who avoided the use of traditional theological language like ‘original sin’ in favor of more ‘modern’ terminology like ‘estrangement.’” Many may be suspicious of Tillich for what appeared to be a failure of lexical nerve: was Tillich’s perspective really compatible with the Christian message? Was he actually speaking about sin and salvation? Was there something lost in his trans-

lation of the contents of the Christian faith when he replaced sin with the language of separation, grace with the language of reunion, and salvation with the language of healing?

I think Finstuen here makes a solid case that Tillich did, in fact, affirm the doctrine of original sin even though the German-American theologian did not always resort to the conventional language of the Christian tradition. For one thing, as Finstuen points out, Tillich never actually eliminated the language of sin from his theological vocabulary. Time and again he recognized the depth of the word “sin” along with the difficulty of replacing it: “we shy away from it but it has a strange quality,” Tillich writes. “It always returns. We cannot escape it.” Secondly, one cannot deny the central role the fall of Adam plays in all of Tillich’s thinking about the human predicament of separation from God along with the separation of all things from their true and proper ground in divine reality. Finstuen underscores this point beautifully: “Although Tillich disputed the fall’s historicity and unsophisticated understandings of its transmission to all humanity from the seed of Adam, he argued that the myth of the fall was replayed in every human life and in every human act” (66). The fall, as Langdon Gilkey has said, was for Tillich not an event in time but a symbol—an absolutely indispensable symbol—disclosing the most basic truth about the human condition: we are not who we should be. We are alienated or estranged from others, from ourselves, and from God. Sin, in short, is “original” for Tillich. It is basic to the human condition, not simply an act, a deliberate wrongdoing, or “missing the mark.” There is something deeply broken and tragic about human life—about all life—and the word Christians since the Apostle Paul use for this brokenness is “sin.”

Why, then, did Tillich sometimes deviate from citing the word “sin?” According to Finstuen, Tillich “employed the term ‘estrangement’” to clarify the meaning and force of the doctrine of original sin in language more palpable to modern ears (66). Tillich’s concern, as noted, is that “sin” has lost much of its depth and force and so new words are necessary to communicate its true and original meaning. Of course, Tillich is not alone in performing this act of translation even though Finstuen never mentions the “liberal” theologian’s classical predecessors. John Calvin serves as a good example. Long before Tillich drew upon the language of “estrangement” for sin, Calvin employed it to describe the nature of the fall—at least according to the Battles’ translation

of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*: “As it was the spiritual life of Adam to remain united and bound to his Maker, so estrangement from him was the death of his soul.” Perhaps this is why Finstuen suggests once along the way that Tillich’s use of “estrangement” was only apparently or seemingly modern. While an even stronger case could have been made for Tillich on original sin by stressing the continuity he displayed with other classical theologians from the tradition, the treatment Finstuen provides is certainly adequate to the task. Tillich “believed completely in the concept of original sin and labored tirelessly to reintroduce it through new language precisely because he thought it was so central to Christianity” (67).

Tillich aside, Finstuen has with Graham a much harder case to make. Was Graham an exponent of original sin or did he not emphasize the understanding of sin as a mere act or misdeed? Here Finstuen notes repeatedly that the father of modern evangelicalism struggled not with his use of the term sin, but in “balancing his emphasis on particular sins” with sin itself—that is, with sin understood as a condition or “greater ‘disease of the soul’” (136). Graham could remark that “‘sin is found in back of every problem in the world’” (129), and yet, as critics commonly observed according to Finstuen’s meticulous research, Graham often sounded moralistic throughout his crusades, emphasizing *sin as act* almost to the exclusion of *sin as fact*. Letters he wrote in his weekly newspaper column often (though not always) seem to confirm this tendency.

That Graham nevertheless speaks to the problem of original sin apart from its specific manifestation is an extremely important point, one that historians and theologians probably overlook when they stress the dissimilarity between Tillich and Graham. One should not forget, as Finstuen points out, that Graham was first a Presbyterian before he became a Baptist. According to Finstuen, however, Graham ultimately ends up as a Methodist: “In [Graham’s] balancing of [moral] perfectionism and triumphalism with a firm conviction of the pervasiveness of sin, Graham finally reconciled his seemingly contradictory view of human nature. In fact, what he had articulated—in the best tradition of Wesleyan theology—was a mature and straightforward interpretation of Christian sanctification” (149). While Graham did not “disabuse” people of expressing their concerns over sin in terms of “act” rather than “fact,” Graham sometimes reminded them that their sins were expressive of a larger problem called sin,

though he often mixed the two “unevenly” (149). Once we accept or decide for Christ, Graham repeatedly maintained, “sin shall not rule or dominate” and salvation will be forever more.

Here is where the present respondent to Finstuen’s analysis begins to wonder: does the capacity to accept freely or receive God’s offer of salvation in Christ ultimately break the fragile yoke that presumably may have existed between Graham, Niebuhr, and Tillich on the doctrine of original sin? Graham appears firm in the conviction that salvation in Christ is *conditional* upon our response: the “authority of God’s word,” he says, assured born-again Christians of their salvation. “Your uncertainty,” he tells a person doubting his salvation, “is caused by a failure truly to ‘receive Christ’” (146). Faith, in short, is a human work—not a divine gift. Moreover, unlike Arminius or Wesley who both affirmed God’s prevenient grace as the necessary prerequisite for responding freely to God’s offer of salvation in Christ, Graham nowhere mentions such grace—at least in the works cited by Finstuen. Once we hear of the Holy Spirit being implicit in the process of sanctification for Graham (149), but I would like more textual evidence. Without at least some kind of prevenient grace, the fact that human beings can come to Christ of their own free will suggests to me an implicit denial of original sin. Just because Graham was an evangelist “charged with the task of spreading the Gospel” as widely as possible (152) and not an academic theologian does not excuse him from the need to be consistent. A contradiction is a contradiction.

For his part, Tillich is extremely consistent when it comes to the “bondage of the will” in relation to original sin. He writes, “With respect to our fate and vocation we are free; with respect to our relation to God we are powerless.” Indeed, as Finstuen observes, Tillich stressed that saving “faith came from without. An individual could not generate a coura-

geous faith from within the self; he must be ‘grasped’ by God. This infusion of faith supplied the power for man to affirm himself in spite of non-being” (169). Faith is not a human work; it is a gift from God—a God, says Finstuen of Tillich, “that came to the estranged human on God’s terms, not the reverse. [For Tillich] humans had nothing to contribute—not their own religious inclinations, good behavior, spiritual discipline, or success—to the work of our salvation” (175). Otherwise, as Martin Luther would remark, God would not be God and justification (i.e., the acceptance of sinners—a phrase that Tillich, Luther, and Melancthon *all* employed) would not be by grace.

My focus on the understanding Graham and Tillich possessed of faith as a gift or faith as a human work remains a lingering question I still have after reading *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants: The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, Billy Graham, and Paul Tillich*. This question should not obscure what is an otherwise truly impressive, meticulously researched, and well-written account of Tillich, Niebuhr, and Graham—one replete with incredible glimpses especially into the life of Tillich through his letters and correspondence with readers of his work. Perhaps the lingering question I have revolves around an ambiguity in Graham’s work that even Finstuen’s lucid presentation cannot resolve, but until I have this final question answered, I remain only partially persuaded that Graham joins the likes of Tillich and Niebuhr as the third member of a “curious trinity” on the issue of original sin. Some of the talk is there in Graham, and Finstuen documents this well, but the evangelist’s understanding of faith as a human work makes him part ways—in my judgment—from Tillich, especially when it comes to reality of sin as a fact before it is an act.

**YES, RICHARD, THEOLOGY IS A SUBJECT:
TILlich’S SYSTEM OF THE SCIENCES VS.
THE DISCIPLINARY ENCROACHMENTS OF
THE NEW ATHEISM**

GLENN WHITEHOUSE

One of the more interesting literary phenomena of the last decade has been the rise of what has been

called the New Atheism. Books like Richard Dawkins’ *The God Delusion*, Daniel Dennett’s *Breaking the Spell*, and Sam Harris’ *The End of Faith* have taken off in the trade book market, and their authors have become minor celebrities, appearing in talk shows, websites, magazine articles, and the like.¹ Their full bore attack on religious belief, on the grounds that it is superstitious, hypocritical, and inspires acts of prejudice and ethnic violence, makes the New Atheists akin to the old anti-clerical atheists

of the Enlightenment (Dawkins' book in particular seems at times to be answering the question "What if Thomas Paine had Google?"). What does make the New Atheism new, however, is the specific intellectual framework shared by its main proponents. The New Atheists are evolutionary biologists like Dawkins, evolutionary psychologists like Harris, or philosophers exploring the implications of evolutionary science, like Dennett. All of them, to one degree or another, tie their atheist stances to recent advances in genetic biology and evolutionary psychology, claiming that the recent expansion of these fields provides strong evidence against the claims of traditional theistic belief.

Typical of this literature is the way Richard Dawkins poses the question of God in *The God Delusion*, by formulating what he calls "The God Hypothesis": "there exists a superhuman, supernatural intelligence who deliberately designed and created the universe and everything in it, including us."² Note here that Dawkins frames religious faith specifically as an hypothesis, as a scientific theory about the empirical world that in principle is testable like any other. The most direct proponents of this "hypothesis" are fundamentalist creation scientists and intelligent design proponents—those religious believers that pose the proximate annoyance to an evolutionary biologist. But Dawkins intends his critique to extend much further. He insists that *all* religion worth its name is based on the god hypothesis; when he demonstrates that the god hypothesis is empirically improbable, the reader is meant to take this as equivalent to a demonstration of "Why There Almost Certainly is no God"—the title of one his chapters.³

Readers of Paul Tillich should have some ready responses to the New Atheism at their disposal. We could, for instance, point out that Dawkins & Co. are mistaking faith for a weak propositional belief in some hypothesis—this was the "intellectualistic distortion" Tillich discussed in *Dynamics of Faith*.⁴ If we wanted to get fancy about it, we could even agree with the New Atheists to a point, since any good Tillichian knows that God indeed does not "exist," but rather is the ground and abyss of being, as we see in the *Systematic Theology*.⁵ Furthermore, Tillich's frequent critiques of "Biblicism" or what some have called "bibliolatry," distances the Tillichian from any kind of fundamentalism that rejects science outright.⁶ And the complaint of Dawkins and Harris that religious questions are treated as a special category immune from critical scrutiny is hardly go-

ing to stick to the man who wrote that, "serious doubt is confirmation of faith!"⁷

But alas, none of this is likely to satisfy the New Atheists. These authors in fact go out of their way to insulate themselves from theological correction, and Paul Tillich in particular often functions for them as the exception proving their general critique. Sam Harris, in particular, in *The End of Faith*, frequently says that nuanced theological responses to atheism are beside the point, since the God of thinkers like Tillich is quite remote from the God who is the object of ordinary Christian belief. He may have a point.⁸ Richard Dawkins takes this criticism further. While acknowledging that a Christianity that followed the liberal, tolerant approach of thinkers like Tillich would be free of many of the ethical problems he associates with religion, Dawkins is also unrelenting in his attack on the notion that theology should have a seat at the intellectual or academic table. Dawkins is particularly fond of a quip he once heard to the effect that there is no reason to suppose theology is a subject at all—presumably because its object, God, does not exist; no object, no subject studying it.⁹ Dawkins' acerbic response to a theologian in Britain's *Independent* newspaper is typical of his attitude toward our profession: "The achievements of theologians don't do anything, don't affect anything, don't even mean anything. What makes you think that 'theology' is a subject at all? Yours faithfully, Richard Dawkins."¹⁰

How should we imagine Tillich's relation to the New Atheism? I would like to suggest that one fruitful way to do this is to table consideration of the specific claims of theology or science, in order to focus instead on this question of what is or is not a "subject." The New Atheist writers present us with a great deal to think about on this score. Apart from their specific claims about religion, these thinkers all tend to make very strong claims for the broad applicability of biological approaches to areas of knowledge that would traditionally be the domains of the humanities or social sciences. As many will know, Dawkins and Dennett have conceived and popularized a theory that sees human culture as composed of "memes."¹¹ The basic idea behind memes is simple. Natural selection states that evolution occurs wherever three conditions are met: (1) there must be *replication* of the elements undergoing evolution; (2) there must be *variation* in the replication of those elements, establishing a continuing abundance of different elements; and (3) there must be *differential fitness*, where the number of copies of an element

varies based on interactions between features of that element and its environment.¹² Ordinarily the unit of natural selection is a gene, but meme theorists posit a second kind of replicator—a meme is a bit of semiotic information like a phrase, melody, or gesture, whose medium is human language or the human mind, rather than the human genome. Meme theory suggests that we can study how memes succeed, grow, spread, and evolve by extending the principle of natural selection to this new replicator. Memes can group together in coevolving groupings called memplexes, which allow meme theorists to approach complex products of culture such as a religion, an artistic movement, etc. While meme theorists acknowledge that the similarity between memes and genes is analogical, they claim the application of evolutionary theory is not: any element that meets the three conditions posited by the theory of evolution will evolve by natural selection. The appeal of this to Dennett, Dawkins, and others is that memes offer the prospect of a truly scientific approach to culture and its transmission—many of us may be familiar, for instance, with Dennett’s suggestion in *Breaking the Spell* that we can think of the spread of religion as similar in pattern to the spread of a virus.¹³ E.O. Wilson, a thinker closely associated with the New Atheists, has similarly proposed a scientific approach to the humanities and social sciences, this time under the banner of evolutionary psychology. In *Consilience*, Wilson proposes that advances in evolutionary biology hold out the prospect of achieving a scientific, naturalistic account of human consciousness.¹⁴ And, if consciousness can be treated scientifically, so can the products of consciousness—art, music, customs, morality, and religion; in short, what we call culture. *Consilience*’s basic idea is that the astounding success of the natural sciences in producing causal explanations of natural phenomena is based in large part on the linkage of levels of explanation across different disciplines—biological phenomena can be reduced to chemistry, and hence studied by the methods of chemistry; chemistry in turn can be reduced to physics and hence studied using the ideas and methods of physics. This combination of reduction of one realm of scientific objects to another, and linked inquiry whereby scientists whose objects lie further up the chain of reduction receive help from scientists whose objects are more “basic,” is what Wilson means by consilience, and for him it epitomizes fruitful interdisciplinary inquiry. Wilson proposes to advance the study of culture by similarly connecting it to what he would

consider the more basic scientific study of human psychology that generated these products of consciousness. For Wilson, consilience opens the door for science to become the discourse that unifies the branches of knowledge, again enabling a scientific approach to the traditional subject matter of the humanities and social sciences. Some scholars have taken up the cue suggested by the consilience and “meme studies” approaches to produce scholarship with the ambition to study culture scientifically—for instance Loyal Rue in *Religion is not About God* and Brian Boyd’s *On the Origin of Stories*.¹⁵

Beyond their direct attack on theology, then, the New Atheist thinkers pose a broader challenge to the identity of *all* the humanities and social sciences as independent subjects or disciplines. The combination of “meme-ology” and the consilient scientific approach to culture has spawned what one might call a new cultural naturalism that for the most part sees little use for the methods and approaches of other academic fields. For Dennett and Wilson, the humanities and social sciences are victims of confusion, folk psychology, and mystifying habits of thought, and stand sorely in need of science’s helping hand—or more accurately, of a total scientific makeover. So, if theology is part of the humanities—and I would insist it is—then some of the issues we have with the New Atheism are issues we share with all of the humanities, which confront the ambition of cultural naturalism to expand and usurp the study of culture.

With this broader challenge in view, I would like to think about Tillich’s response to the New Atheism not by way of his well known theological works, but rather through his early and often forgotten book, *The System of the Sciences according to Objects and Methods*.¹⁶ In this text from 1923, Tillich gave his response to a question that was very much in the air at that time, namely, the organization and intellectual justification of the academic disciplines. This issue had gained salience by the turn of the century due to the development of the social sciences, advances in the natural sciences (especially psychology), and the rise to prominence of the research university; thinkers like Wilhelm Dilthey, Max Weber, and Ernst Cassirer were all addressing this question around the same time. Tillich’s approach to the problem of organizing intellectual life relied, as the title of the book suggests, on the idea that an epistemological approach that derived the disciplines in terms of their ways of knowing must be correlated with an approach that accounts for the beings that

are known, in all their diversity and resistance to thought. Both Kantian reflection and the imperative to go “to the things themselves” announced in the new phenomenological approach of Husserl would be honored in Tillich’s system.

With this goal of correlating objects and methods, Tillich set out in the book to build a system of sciences based in large part on a distinction between *form*, which is thought’s power to construct rational, formal structure, and *import*, which signifies being’s independence from and resistance to thinking. With this distinction in mind, Tillich constructs a system that divides intellectual life into: (a) the sciences of thought, in which form predominates, and which includes subjects like logic and mathematics; (b) the sciences of being, which examine concrete beings in their diversity, using a diversity of methods. (This includes subjects like mathematical physics, biology, psychology, but also history, anthropology and the fields of applied technology;) and (c) the sciences of spirit or human sciences, which are distinctive in that they are places where human beings know themselves, not simply in the sense of observing themselves. Rather in the sciences of the spirit, human being gives itself norms for the creation of new realms of meaning.¹⁷ Philosophy, art, law, politics, and theology itself all fall under the human sciences for Tillich. Aside from this broad systematic structure, another important feature of Tillich’s thought in the *System* is his focus on the *individual* thing, or Gestalt, as the entity that resists complete categorization by thought, but which also is capable of being constructed *by* thinking in several different ways; and hence of being known according to several different methods.¹⁸ The system Tillich constructs does not correspond exactly with the disciplinary divisions or departmental structures that actually exist in the modern university, then or now; and Tillich stresses that the purpose of a system of the sciences is not to dictate the practice of intellectual workers in the different fields. But the system does function to set limits, in that it recognizes a primary correlation between a kind of object and the epistemological method that knows it, even as it recognizes that other disciplines may be able to approach that object “from the side” as it were. And the system retains a critical function, in that it allows Tillich to critique the tendency of particular disciplines to make “imperialistic claims” over the whole of knowledge (32), and beyond that, to provide specific reasons why psychology, for instance, cannot function as the paradigm of the sciences of spirit (92f).¹⁹

Its impossible to do justice to a complex book like the *System of the Sciences* in the limited scope of a conference paper—for a more complete analysis of the work, I would refer the reader to Duane Olson’s excellent commentary listed in the bibliography. However, begging indulgence for the brevity of my summary, I would like to move to list some of the advantages I believe Tillich’s system can offer to humanists and social scientists seeking a response to the “meme-ology,” “consciousness studies,” and “consilience” that the New Atheist thinkers offer as their gift to cross-disciplinary inquiry.

First, I think Tillich’s *System* provides a compelling response to the *reductionism* that is an ingredient in the naturalistic approaches to culture. The hallmark of scientific “consilience,” as E.O. Wilson has it, is the capacity to reduce from one level like biology to a more basic level like chemistry, and to do so in the process of inquiring after the *cause* of the biological phenomena being studied.²⁰ In Wilson’s book, “reductionism” has a strongly positive connotation, and is far from the “dirty word” status the term carries in the humanities and social sciences. Wilson, Dennett, and Dawkins assume that all questions about the human mind and its creations are variations on the causal question “how did it get this way?” Then, they set out to answer such questions with the tools of evolutionary psychology and “meme science.” Tillich faced similar quasi-scientific claims that relations of meaning and logical implication reduce to mental processes of thinkers—the “psychologism” with which readers of Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* are familiar. Tillich dealt with such claims by carefully contextualizing scientific approaches within the overall system. While acknowledging that causality is the main category of the *empirical sciences*, he limits the imperialistic claims of psychology in *logic* by pointing out that knowledge of the process leading *to* a judgment tells us nothing about its truth or falsity; in the *human sciences* by pointing out that in culture human being does not just observe itself but gives itself norms and laws.²¹ Although psychology tells us something legitimate about the *form* of the life of the mind, it is not adequate to the *content* of what the mind creates.²² Another way to say this is that empirical natural science cannot shake its third person observational stance; but Tillich can account for the dynamic creativity of cultural life by understanding it in terms of spirit’s *intention* toward the universal.

Second, by correlating the object of each science with a method, Tillich makes it clear why we *need*

an intellectual world of different methodologies. Reductionism assumes that the sequence of progressively more basic scientific methods can apply to any object properly divided or broken down for examination. However, Tillich shows that objects of study are *not* available indifferently to any science that might fancy appropriating them; rather, there is a specific correlation between an epistemological stance and the feature of being that is appropriate to it. It would not do to approach philosophy as if it were the empirical study of how thinking came into existence, since to do so would fail to connect thinking with the norms and ideals that are the object of philosophical inquiry. Likewise, it would not be fitting either to overburden evolutionary psychology with normative or cultural questions that exceed *its* question about the biology of cognitive processes. Because the naturalistic approach lacks an adequate notion of the intentional relation between noetic stance and thematized object, and is incapable of asking the Kantian question of critical reason, it has a difficult time acknowledging the purpose of intellectual methodologies that do not fit their model of reduction to more basic processes. Tillich's *System*, informed both by Kantian critical philosophy and by Husserl's early work, is able to provide philosophical justification for the notion that there are different regions of knowledge, each with distinct ways of knowing and norms of inquiry.

Third, I think that Tillich's approach offers a resource for current interest in interdisciplinary inquiry that is superior to the "consilient" interdisciplinarity offered by the New Atheists. Two features of Tillich's *System* encourage careful interdisciplinary work. One is the phenomenological cast we have been discussing, which compels the researcher to think of the object of his or her study as a thematized intentional object rather than a naively encountered "thing." This encourages the interdisciplinary researcher to be clear about the reason why a particular method correlates with the object under investigation.²³ Complementing this is Tillich's focus on the *individual* or *Gestalt*. For Tillich the individual is any entity, conceived as a whole in the totality of its relation to other beings. The individual can be the focal point of more than one methodology. This is because it has parts that can be studied by particular sciences, and because it *is* a part of collective entities studied by other sciences. Moreover, it can be studied by the sciences of law and sequence that proceed by abstracting and analyzing properties of individuals. So the individual invites interdiscipli-

nary inquiry but not in a chaotic or "anything goes" kind of way. The individual is not open to study by *every* method, but rather is, to borrow a phrase from Paul Ricoeur, "a limited field of possible constructions."²⁴ When interdisciplinary inquirers must not only approach an individual object, but carefully specify which aspect of that object correlates with the method they are employ, they are less likely to run roughshod over other disciplines out of the conviction that "we are really talking about the same thing"—a tendency that unfortunately is too often on display when scientists approach the field of human culture. The model of interdisciplinary inquiry as a set of distinct methodological constructions of the same individual—different views of the elephant in the famous parable, if you will—gives an alternative to the reductionist approach to interdisciplinarity. This alternative encourages both disciplines to converse, rather than compelling one to defer to the more "basic" insight of the other, and ultimately reducing it to silence.

Finally, Tillich's approach to the subject of *subjects* is to be valued because he provides an alternative to the default mode of classifying disciplines according to the Humanities/ Social Sciences/ Natural Sciences split that matches the institutional divisions of the modern university. Tillich's classification of disciplines is more finely nuanced than the three-division model, and allows for a more precise specification of what each discipline actually does. While the logical method of a philosopher, for instance, may have little in common with an art historian's analysis of sculptural style other than the common designation "humanities," Tillich's approach of classifying objects and methods places the disciplines with more precision and specificity. More than that, I think Tillich's approach helps with the public relations problem that the humanities often have among the natural sciences. For many scientists, the "non-science" fields—as they habitually call them—are perceived as having a "catch-all" character and a loose, "anything-goes" approach to method. Moreover, for Dawkins, Dennett, and Wilson, any resistance by humanists to the scientific approach to consciousness is assumed to result from a misguided Cartesianism; from some rearguard attempt to set off a special reserve of the mind and to defend this "ghost in the machine" from its destiny of being explained scientifically. But in Tillich's *System*, the disciplines of the human sciences lose their blurry edges and "catch-all" character, as they are carefully located within the system of sciences.

Moreover, Tillich, contrary to what scientists would expect from a humanist, actually places biology, psychology, and sociology within the same group in the system, and in doing so rejects the Cartesian dualism that he sees at the root of the division between “natural science” and “social science.”²⁵ The New Atheists are going to have to work much harder to dismiss the humanities as intellectually soft under Tillich’s description.

The one limitation of Tillich’s *System* I would like to mention is that the question of language is insufficiently thematized in the book. Coming after Husserl, but before Heidegger’s major works, Tillich’s *System of the Sciences* does not primarily view the humanities in terms of the study of written or oral discourse, and it does not treat the disciplines themselves as kinds of discourse. The study of language is mentioned in the *System*.²⁶ But it is located as one subfield of the sciences of being, not as the central category it has become after the “turn to language” spurred by Heidegger, among others. I mention this lacuna because I believe it can become something of a liability when engaging with the New Atheism. The “memes” of which Dawkins and Dennett speak offer a plausible way for researchers to study the circulation of ideas and themes in culture, quite apart from the intentions of their “carriers”—human minds. Indeed, Dennett even proposes that human minds themselves be thought as complexes of memes that process other memes.²⁷ So it might be that Tillich’s careful delineation of different epistemological stances is rendered irrelevant in the cultural domain imagined by meme-ology: a world of circulating bits of information without strong agents, speakers, or listeners.

For this reason, I would propose supplementing Tillich’s approach to the system of sciences with the hermeneutical theory of Paul Ricoeur. In *Interpretation Theory* as well as other works, Ricoeur offered a theory of language that lets us see intentionality as much as a feature of *discourse*, of language, than as an epistemological stance.²⁸ Because Ricoeur passed through the challenge presented by linguistic structuralism, his hermeneutics is able to acknowledge those objectivizing, third-person methods that investigate language apart from its connection to speakers and hearers; he is even able to leave room for the suspicion that these impersonal features of language, culture and human psychology decenter the thinking and speaking “I.”²⁹ But his hermeneutic also clearly delineates those features of language that tie it to speakers and hearers, and that make it a medium for

the mimesis of human life. In Ricoeur’s hermeneutic, then, I see an approach that is broadly consistent with the way Tillich sorts out the modes of inquiry in his *System*, and which updates the approach to respond to the specific forms in which scientism and psychologism have appeared in our own day.

When it comes to religion, however, Ricoeur’s hermeneutics tends to limit itself to the interpretation of canonical scripture. Here is where Tillich’s *System* again becomes relevant to the question that got us started: the subject of theology and whether or not theology is a “subject.” The major category of theology for Tillich in the *System of the Sciences* is *theonomy*, which forms a counterpart to *autonomy* across the system of sciences. While all knowing intends its unconditioned depth in some way, the autonomous approach primarily intends form, while theonomy primarily intends import.³⁰ Both are opposed to *heteronomy*, which in religion would be the erection of sacred truth or sacred community in opposition to autonomous cultural forms. In associating theology with the systematic feature of theonomy, Tillich says some things that might be surprising to the New Atheist critics of theology: “The truth of theology is dependent on the degree to which it abolishes itself as an independent discipline”;³¹ and “[the] highest task [of theonomous philosophy] is to surrender its own independence and to exhibit its unity with autonomous philosophy”;³² or again, “there can be no theological aesthetics and doctrine of science”.³³ So the idea that theology could form an independent source of truth that would compete or interfere with the sciences is specifically eschewed in Tillich’s view of theonomy. Hence the fear that theology desires dominance over the other intellectual disciplines is allayed. On the other hand, these quotes tend to deny that theology constitutes a separate method or discipline—so perhaps theology is not a subject, and Richard Dawkins is right after all.

Tillich’s discussion of theonomy need not leave us in this lurch, however. What Tillich’s program in the *System* does advocate is conceiving theology as a broad theology of culture, whose tasks would be twofold. First, theology would reflect on the theonomous dimension as it appears across the realm of culture. To the extent that all cultural expressions intend the unconditioned through import, it is possible to speak of a theonomous metaphysics, a theonomous ethics, a theonomous approach to art, and so forth.³⁴ Theology would not dictate the content of these fields, but rather would have to take up

the hermeneutical task of interpreting the language of these cultural domains as symbols of the unconditioned. We can think of this task as the appropriation of theonomous patterns in fragments of discourse scattered across the field of culture. The theologian in fulfilling this task is called upon to be a humanist, broadly conceived, a person cultivated in the works of culture and conversant in the languages used to investigate them. The second task of theology would be to reflect on the system of sciences itself, conceived as a reflection of the intention of all knowing toward its unconditioned depth. Theology is, in this sense, “theonomous systematics,” as Tillich puts it, and it requires a person conversant in the language of metaphysics and autonomous philosophy to complete its task.³⁵

So if theology is not a *subject* in the sense of having its own separate method and place in the system, it is also not nothing, as Dawkins and the New Atheists would have us believe. Theology has a *task*; not the task that proponents of religious heteronomy might want, but a more interesting task that brings theology in conversation with the rest of the disciplines. And it has an *object*; not an object in the sense of God-in-a-box, but an object of study in discerning and recovering theonomy as a feature of cultural phenomena. Following Tillich’s *System of the Sciences*, not only can humanists respond to and reject the proposal that their disciplines become a sub-field of “consciousness studies” or “meme science,” but theology itself can be clearly grounded as part of the humanities, utilizing the methods of the humanities, and its object can be discerned as a dimension of culture, and can be clearly distinguished from any rear-guard defense of a quasi-scientific “God hypothesis.” Yes, Richard, theology is a subject.

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² Dawkins, 52.

³ Dawkins, 137.

⁴ Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper, 1958), 30-35.

⁵ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1951).

⁶ cf. Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 80-85; and Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, 36-37.

⁷ Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 22.

⁸ Harris, 64-65.

⁹ Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 79-80.

¹⁰ Richard Dawkins, letter to *Independent* newspaper March 20, 1992, cited in Ian Markham, ed. *A World Religions Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 22.

¹¹ Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 189-201; Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1991), 199-208.

¹² Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 200.

¹³ Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 170, 184.

¹⁴ Edward O. Wilson, *Consilience: the Unity of Knowledge* (New York, Alfred Knopf, 1998).

¹⁵ Loyal Rue, *Religion is Not About God: How Spiritual Traditions Nurture our Biological Nature and What to Expect When They Fail* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2006); Brian Boyd, *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition and Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2009).

¹⁶ Paul Tillich, *The System of the Sciences According to Objects and Methods* (London: Associated University Presses, 1981). In my account of Tillich's System, I have been guided by the commentary of Duane Olson, *Paul Tillich's Early Philosophy of Religion from Within the System of the Sciences* (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Iowa, 1997).

¹⁷ Tillich, *System of the Sciences*, 29-41.

¹⁸ Tillich, *System of the Sciences*, 57-63.

¹⁹ Tillich, *System of the Sciences*, 32, 92-93.

²⁰ Wilson, *Consilience*, 65-71.

²¹ Tillich, *System of the Sciences*, 70, 47, 38.

²² Tillich, *System of the Sciences*, 92-93.

²³ On the usefulness of the idea of intentionality in differentiating the structures and objects of consciousness,

see Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000), 11-16.

²⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action* trans. Kathleen Blamey & John Thompson (Evanston: Northwestern, 1991), 160.

²⁵ Tillich, *System of the Sciences*, 85.

²⁶ Tillich, *System of the Sciences*, 133-135.

²⁷ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 210.

²⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: TCU Press, 1976), 14-19.

²⁹ cf. Paul Ricoeur, "Existence and Hermeneutics" trans. Kathleen McLaughlin, in *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 3-24.

³⁰ Tillich, *System of the Sciences*, 203-204.

³¹ Tillich, *System of the Sciences*, 208.

³² Tillich, *System of the Sciences*, 205.

³³ Tillich, *System of the Sciences*, 212.

³⁴ Tillich, *System of the Sciences*, 210-215.

³⁵ Tillich, *System of the Sciences*, 206-208.

IS THERE A GOSPEL OF NEW ATHEISM?¹

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In the span of a few years there was a veritable flood of best-selling books propounding what has come to be termed the "new atheism." Taken together in sum, the new atheists tell us religion has been one of the principal causes of human suffering, that it has led to violence, and that it promotes extremism. In addition, the religious mindset thwarts the rationalistic approach to the world and human problem solving, allowing untestable and unsupported mythological stories to serve as explanations for natural phenomena. And even more, when actually examining what religious believers believe when they attest to their faith in God or in sacred

scripture, they are riddled with contradictions that should either outrage the mind or offend moral sensibilities. Plain facts told in the most provocative style, the new atheists seized on the cultural angst felt by many of those who felt left out or beaten down by the cultural warriors on the right wing and who worried that the two successive terms of President George W. Bush set the United States on a perilous path towards theocracy.

But when examining their central claims—not to mention the public discussion that surrounded their publications—one has to ask whether anyone is really surprised to learn that the historic faiths are guilty of self-contradictions, that religious fanatics are prone to violence, and that all religions have a human origin. There was a time when these observations were truly radical and provocative. But between then and now a gulf of religious scholarship and critique has transpired, heightening our awareness and forcing any religious devotee not only to learn the truths of his or her tradition, but also to rethink the nature of religious truth. Most—with the exception of fundamentalists—would now concede that religions are *true* not in the same way that science or mathematics are *true*, but more in line with

the way a Picasso portrait conveys a *subjective* truth that belies the merely representational. For instance, except for the most literal-minded, the Bible is not proven untrue or unreliable because it has two contradictory stories of creation in the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis, or because it has four different portraits of Christ included within the New Testament. On the contrary, an appreciation of these variances, even contradictions, is essential to understanding the particular nature of truth that belongs to the religious.

In this sense, the problem that the new atheists have with religion is not religion *per se*, but with religious literalism—or more technical still, in the words of Paul Tillich, the problem with most religious conceptions of God is that they are a form of “theological theism.” That is to say, the new atheists’ understandings of God only work as a singular piece of a metaphysical puzzle within a particular metaphysical system of thought or belief. When theological theism is the problem, Tillich goes on to argue, atheism is the proper—indeed, *Christian*—response. This being said, atheism can also fall prey to the problem of theological theism whenever it is expressed as a categorical rejection of God and any sense of ontological understanding of the world. In other words, a rigid or dogmatic atheism replaces one flawed puzzle-board with another flawed puzzle-board with different pieces. Consequently, many Christian responses to new atheism are arguments for one theological theism verses another (see, for example, Varghese 2007, 180-183).

This presentation will argue that the so-called *new* atheists are guilty of the same problems that Tillich predicted of future atheism, and suggests a radical theological critique of the new atheism. In other words, the argument will be that the new atheists do not go far enough in their critique of traditional Christianity. Put succinctly, *the new atheism is insufficiently radical*. To make this argument, I will first draw on the radical theology of the American “death of God” movement, which paradoxically proposes an atheistic Christianity that is *both* atheistic and theistic. Second, I will examine how theology itself has been made radical by passing through the crucible of the death of God. By articulating this radical approach to religion, I hope to show that the idea of a Christian God is not one that is so easy to knock down or simply argue away with atheism, precisely because the concept of God in Christianity is dynamic, contradictory, imprecise, dependent on interpretation, and therefore highly resistant to logi-

cal or empirical dismissal. While there will always be some benefit in exposing the contradictions to religious belief and the dangers inherent to religious practice, the surprising conclusion is that we might not realize that we are simultaneously establishing the intellectual and cultural conditions by which a non-theistic conception of God might be *reborn*, stripped free of the straightjacket of theological theism, no longer the creation of the conceiving mind, but a radical Other who still has the power to surprise.

Paul Tillich and Theological Theism

Much of the radical theology in the second half of the 20th century to the present begins with theologian Paul Tillich and his use of atheism as a tool for doing Christian theology. Tillich saw the great atheistic thinkers of the 19th century as “Christian humanists,” and believed that Nietzsche’s declaration of the “death of God” was an attack upon what he called “theological theism” (Tillich 1996, 32-33; Tillich 1952, 142). By this term, Tillich (1952, 184) referred to a belief system that is based upon theological argument “dependent on the religious substance which it conceptualizes.” To this end, most arguments for the existence of God are—as our new atheist writers have demonstrated—easily argued away, usually using some modified forms of the Thomistic teleological and cosmological arguments. These arguments are theological by virtue of the fact that the argument against them—the assumption that God does not exist requires the same kind of epistemological and metaphysical assumptions as assuming that God does exist.

For Tillich, any God that can be explained so easily or argued away so easily suggests a “theological theism.” *If your God can be killed, it should be* because any God that can be killed is a God that is an object among other objects, simply a “thing” or “place-holder” within an otherwise fragile metaphysical worldview. Beyond this, Tillich (1952, 15; see also Tillich 1951, 1.245) argues, such a view is idolatrous or even “demonic”—that is to say, an ideology that causes evil in the world. The new atheists’ moral arguments against God—generally, that religions cause people to do bad things—is thus preempted in Tillich’s theology. The reason why religious people do evil is that the religious import of their metaphysical systems is not rooted in the *ground of being*, the *ultimate concern* of all that is. Tillich wrote about this openly as someone who witnessed firsthand the fall of late nineteenth-century

German idealism and its antecedents transform into the horror of the Third Reich. As this experience attests, theological theisms are susceptible to being superseded by nationalism, economics, and racism. According to Tillich, the religions of theological theism really do “poison everything.” They are religions of idolatry because they are predicated on the God of theological theism, rather than the “God-beyond-God” that is the true object of Christian belief.

It is for this reason that Tillich employs atheism as a reaction against the God of theological theism as a *tool* of religious reform. This atheism is a rejection not of God or religious belief *per se*, but of the particular idolatrous rendering of God accomplished by the dominance of theological theism. As such, Tillich (1952, 185) writes, atheism “is justified as the reaction against theological theism and its disturbing implications.” But atheism cannot be a sustainable metaphysic because it cannot provide a ground for a radical self-transcendence; in other words, atheism alone is insufficiently transformative.

What is radically transformative for society in the atheistic shifts of Dawkins and Hitchens, for example, remains to be seen, unless one seriously considers that we would not find an excuse to wage war if it were not for religion. Hitchens’ (2007b, 277ff) final chapter to his best-selling *God is Not Great* points toward “the need for a new enlightenment,” without really saying what such enlightenment is or means (and even forgetting the religious products of the enlightenment, such as John Wesley and the “Methodist” movements). Other than warning us against a “violence delusion,” what further insight does the new atheism offer? Is it rational to believe that humans will not find excuses to make war? Dawkins (2007b, 310) makes similar rhetoric, proposing an “Atheists for Jesus” slogan, which would hopefully “kick start the meme of super niceness in a post-Christian society” that leads “society away from the nether regions of Darwinian origins into kinder and more compassionate uplands of post-singularity enlightenment,” and leading away from “supernaturalist obscurantism.”

In contrast, Tillich (1964, 25) proposed a new paradigm for theological thinking, one that famously requires atheism to occur together with theism: “Genuine religion without an element of atheism cannot be imagined,” he wrote; doubt is essential to any conception of faith. Tillich (1951, 1.27) wrote early in his three-volume *Systematic Theology* that

atheism is “anti-Christian on Christian terms.” Atheism can be a rejection of Christianity on Christian terms: “Nietzsche,” he wrote, “acknowledged this when he said he had the blood of his greatest enemies—the priests—within himself.” This is “the paradox” of atheistic thinking—that atheism is “the substance of what is Christian” (Tillich 1996, 32). Christianity only stays relevant as a religion so long as it allows itself to be purged by the tool of its own atheistic critique; or as Tillich (1996, 52) puts it, by virtue of its ability to sustain “continuous self-negation.” Without this *semper negativa*, he wrote, “Christianity is not true Christianity.”

This line of thinking led Tillich to declare that “God does not exist,” since “existence” is an ontological category for objects. God, then, is *being-itself*, an ontological category not only all its own but implicitly projecting and grounding all that is. A God “beyond essence and existence” must be *denied* to be *affirmed*: “to argue that God exists is to deny him” (Tillich 1951, 1.205). By denying the “existence” of God while still affirming faith in the God-beyond-God, Tillich effectively “pulls the rug out” from beneath the new atheists’ respective critiques. This is because Tillich’s radical conception of God is not a God easily argued away because he not only *anticipated* the atheistic critique but even more, was in general *agreement* with it, and actually *employed* it towards his own ends.

This being said, rather than simply rejecting the idea of God outright, Tillich insists instead that the task of those seriously grappling with the meaning of religion for the contemporary world was to think of God differently—a task that is more difficult and radical than that outlined by the new atheists. When exposing the fallacies and dangers inherent to religious belief, for example, Dawkins and Hitchens argue against a God of theological theism, a large object that is easily knocked down. Tillich points to the fact that this kind of atheism has a Christian function and is an appropriate response to a fundamental theological error within conservative Christianity. Consequently, conservative Christian responses to Tillich are nearly the same as evangelical responses to the New Atheism: Tillich’s God is not the God of a literal reading of the Bible and violates an implied, but essential, contradiction between Christianity and science. Tillich’s God, as *Being-itself*, is a conception of God beyond cosmological, teleological, and moral arguments for or against God. As a radical Christian conception, the new atheists’ arguments

are not theologically sophisticated beyond their own theological atheisms to speak for or against the idea.

Thomas Altizer's Gospel of Christian Atheism

If Tillich's God as being-itself is an Anselmic "greater-than-can-be-conceivable" being-itself, radical theologian Thomas Altizer's theology takes a different direction. For Altizer the greater-than-can-be-conceivable God *once existed*, but no longer does; God is not pseudonymous with ontology or ontology-itself; rather, "Godhead" reflects an *etiological* ontology, an ontology with an historical or causal aspect. The primordial Godhead—transcendent, bigger-than-may-be-conceivable, pre-Genesis 1—is dead, and had died a long time ago. Yet that God continues to die and self-negate through history, and its transcendence is finally and actually poured out and exhausted in the incarnation of Christ: the death of God as an act of kenosis par excellence.

Following the descent into Hell and resurrection of Christ, Altizer writes, the Holy Spirit is radically released into the flesh of all of humanity and that Spirit and flesh are finally united.² This unity is not static but dynamic and continues the etiology of the primordial Godhead: the Godhead may be provoked in the immanence of the present through human self-denial and self-subversion. That is, God continues to die through acts of justice, charity, and negation. Similarly, when persons die or suffer, they may also speak of God dying in the present as well. The human body is the temple, as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3; it is the residence of God.

It should be noted that Altizer's theology has been rejected as fantasy, heresy, and even theological theism. Concerning the latter charge, for instance, the deconstructive philosopher of religion John Caputo has charged that Altizer offers a "Big Story" or "Final Story" in the form of theology that replaces another "Big Story" (that is, traditional Christianity) that is to be rejected as false. Altizer's alternative is, Caputo (2007, 68-69) quips, "quite the Tall Tale." In other words, by Caputo's reckoning, Altizer's death-of-God theology simply becomes another founding narrative, making absolute claims that actually defy, if not contradict, the very iconoclastic logic of the death of God. As Caputo (see 2001, 56-66) argues, when properly understood, the death of God implies the death of the death of God, just as the modern Enlightenment critiques of religion ironically establish the conditions for the post-modern return of religion.

While Caputo offers an important corrective here to the potential excesses of the radical death-of-God movement, Altizer's insistence on the theological nihilism that characterizes the religiosity of the present moment remains a clarion call. By providing a *theological* analysis of this situation, his analysis goes further and remains more radical than the provocations of the new atheists. In contrast to the new atheists, Altizer's atheism contends that the immanent and enfleshed reality of Godhead in the present is not easily quantifiable or defined, and is defined as much by its absence than its presence. In fact, Altizer's theology directly points toward American Evangelical theology as worshipping a dead God, one that ceased to exist years and years ago and a God that is not changing or suffering with human flesh. To the contrary, those Christians worship Satan—and while they deny that God is dead, they themselves worship a dead God and even (to borrow Mary Daly's term) *lust* for death (see Daly 1984, 8ff). Altizer's critique of Evangelicalism is far more sobering than, for example, Sam Harris's (2008, 91) claim that American schools have failed "to announce the death of God in a way that each generation can understand" so that a common enemy might be decided upon Islam.

Beyond this, Altizer's self-subverting Godhead is a conception of God, although radical and perhaps nonsensical to many, that remains standing following a new atheist critique. A dissolving, dismembering, kenoting God is, according to Altizer, implicit in Biblical Christianity, even if mainstream Christianity would not only reject such a reading but also harshly implicate Christianity as a source of evil in our culture. The point is that a God that is no longer transcendent, totalitarian over all that is, takes who sides with political entities with power, or thought of as a cosmic Santa Claus, is not so easy to argue away with traditional arguments against God. To be sure, the vulnerable God is not a foreign concept within other kinds of academic Christian theology and it is as equally ignored by American Evangelicals as the new atheists.

Discourse of a weakening God threatens both Evangelicals and atheists, and reduces their theological theisms to similar tall tales that are chosen by individuals for political and social gain. However, Altizer's offers a vision of Christianity where the individual only has to lose, finding joy in the "eternal death of the crucifixion," requiring of the individual to take up his or her own cross and carry that curse of Christ to his or her own depths, following

the steps of Christ, into the Hell of humanity (Altizer 2002, 105; 2006, 68; see also Rollins 2006; 2008). This is where Altizer suggests we find the emptying of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

I do not mean to diminish the importance of the new atheists' popularity nor their message, as we have, in fact, shown that atheism is not only healthy for the practice of Christian theology, but that it is *necessary*. At the same time, we must take issue with the "evangelical" nature of the new atheism, which assumes that it has Good News to share at all cost for the ultimate future of humanity by the conversion of as many people as possible. The Good News of the new atheism is liberation from repressive religion—but *then what?* We would also take the same issue up with what has become "evangelical" Christianity. Although it offers a liberative message and ethos, it also inspires intolerance and violence in the world (Peters 2008, 164; see also Gianetti 2008). At the same time, evangelical Christianity believes itself to be the answer to the problem of contemporary atheism, just as new atheism poses itself as the answer to the problem of theism. The all-consuming, evangelical nature of both sides encourages endless conflict without progress.

Radical Christian theology offers a new way of thinking about God and atheism as an *a/theology*, whereby an affirmation of God requires a perpetual denial of false conceptions of God, even from within the system of Christianity itself. The new atheists

also ignore the fact that there are actual practicing communities of "religious" atheists; for example, within Unitarian Universalism in the United States and the Ikon Community in Ireland. [See Rollins (2006, 77-137) and Pomeroy (2008)]. Tillich (1996, 60-61) conceived of a radical Christianity that is confident enough that the *kind of truth* it offered is deeper than anything literal, to the point that the question of God's existence could joyfully be both a "yes and no." Christianity, then, becomes a cause against systematic claims of certainty from both theistic and atheistic claims, and instead a dialectic progression *from within itself* that both affirms and betrays God-idols and no-God-idols equally (Rollins 2008, 168-171). More radical than atheism, the death of God is at once an acknowledgement of both the failure and promise of religion.

¹ Thanks to Jeff Robbins.

² Altizer's theology is found in his major works: *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (1966); *The Descent into Hell* (1970); *The Self-Embodiment of God* (1977); *Total Presence* (1980); *History as Apocalypse* (1985); *Genesis and Apocalypse* (1990); *The Genesis of God* (1993); *The Contemporary Jesus* (1997); *The New Gospel of Christian Atheism* (2001); *Godhead and the Nothing* (2003); and *Living the Death of God* (2006).

PAUL TILlich'S THEOLOGY CONCERNING HEALTH AND CHRONIC DISEASE

DEVAN STAHL

Amongst theologians writing at the turn of the century, perhaps none speaks to the material conditions of the human body, health, and wholeness more passionately than Paul Tillich. In many ways, Tillich's theology speaks profoundly to the concerns of many who experience chronic disease and its stigmatizing effects in society. Unfortunately, Tillich's placement of bodily disease into the category of estrangement rather than finitude risks labeling persons with disabling chronic diseases as unsavable and the suffering they experience as irredeemable. While all persons are estranged and partially "diseased" in Tillich's estimation, those who are most literally considered physically or mentally

diseased by our society may feel the sting of Tillich's writing most acutely. By resituating chronic disease into Tillich's category of natural finitude, a condition occurring due to the fragility and limited nature of human bodies, theologians may to continue the work of reframing our conceptions of health, wholeness, and normality begun by disability theologians and ethicists.

Feelings of estrangement, as described by Tillich, while felt by all, are often commonplace for individuals whose encounter with disease has caused them to feel a disjunction from their bodies. Those who have lost the sense of social acceptability due to a particular illness or disabling disease can become to feel alienated from both the corporate body and their own bodies.¹ For persons with chronic disease, Tillich's insistence on accepting divine *acceptance* is often the long journey of coming to terms with one's own body and learning to accept one's life as

whole, not in spite of, but along with physical abnormality.

Courage in the face of finitude and vulnerability, as Tillich understands it, is manifest in the everyday lives of persons who live with “diseased” bodies. This courage is rarely regarded as heroic, but it is courageous to continue to *be* despite intimate encounters with one’s finitude potentially caused by

the onset of illness. Tillich’s need for a person to be reconciled to him or herself, humanity, and with life as a whole² is a need that is deeply personal for those who live with both the painful sufferings of their bodies as well as an un-accepting and unaccommodating society that alienates those who are different.

Because Tillich’s anti-supernaturalist theology offers no ultimate or conclusive vision of healed bodies reconstituted in the after-life, Tillich challenges us to speak to the human predicament as it presents itself in the multidimensional unity of life. Positively, Tillich complicates our understanding of health by describing health as multidimensional: health has physical, chemical, biological, psychological, mental, and historical dimensions. By incorporating these dimensions of life into our understanding of ontology, Tillich’s theology goes against the larger society’s understanding of health as purely somatic.

Within his understanding, Tillich does not confuse the various “healers” that are required to restore health to the various dimensions of one’s life in constructing his understanding of the multidimensional unity of life. Tillich knows that the medical doctor may be necessary for restoring bodily health, as the psychotherapist may be needed for mental health and the minister for spiritual health. The doctor cannot claim to have healed a person simply by restoring bodily health. Moreover, healing in one dimension in life can have both positive and negative implications for other dimensions of healing. Healers must collaborate with one another to reach the whole person.³

Tillich offers many positive concepts for holistic health care, some only now gaining wide acceptance in Western society. If Tillich were simply making a recommendation for collaboration amongst society’s healers, then we could applaud his forward thinking, but, by so closely linking bodily and spiritual health, Tillich risks connecting bodily disease with separation from God. Tillich’s correlation of health with salvation and disease with estrangement is poten-

tially deeply troubling for those living with chronic disease or disability.

Tillich’s conception of health and disease may be merely disconcerting if they are to be taken purely metaphorically, but when applied to human bodies, the correlation of disease with a personal and particular estrangement from God⁴ (along with tragic universal estrangement), takes on potentially oppressive applications. Rather than understanding bodily disease as implicated in humanity’s finitude, Tillich appears to more closely align disease with a condition associated with personal estrangement, and the result is a deeply disconcerting ontology of the “diseased” body.

The troubling connections between bodily healing and salvation begin to arise in Tillich’s description of the multi-dimensional unity of life and its implications for overall health. In *The Meaning of Health*, Tillich states, “in every dimension of life, all dimensions are potentially or actually present.... The multidimensional unity of life in man calls for a multidimensional concept of health, of disease, and of healing, but in such a way that it becomes obvious that in each dimension all the others are present.”⁵ Tillich goes on to say that “complete healing [of the human being] includes healing under all dimensions [of his or her life].”⁶ By so intimately connecting all dimensions of healing, Tillich runs the risk of making *complete* healing unattainable for those who have chronic diseases that cannot be ameliorated, much less healed. It was Tillich’s belief that healing in life was always fragmentary, but Tillich seems to deny even brief theonomous moments of spiritual fulfillment or “ecstasy” for those whose bodies resist healing.

Tillich’s focus on the healing of disease threatens to further exacerbate the problem of salvation for persons with chronic disease. For Tillich, the healing of disease is the power of God at work in the world as exhibited in the life of Jesus. Jesus, for Tillich, is the savior whose healing power indicates the coming of the new eon, because in him, there is no conflict between the religious and medical.⁷ After describing the power Jesus gave his disciples to heal all manner of disease and sickness, Tillich declares, “the identity of healing, bodily and mental, and the presence of salvation can not be expressed more clearly.”⁸ Since Jesus handed this healing power over to the disciples, Tillich believed that announcing salvation is at hand and the ability to heal are one and the same act.⁹ Tillich boldly asserts, “To perform parts of this act is the task of the disciples—this and noth-

ing else.”¹⁰ Those who wish to be disciples of Christ, must work to heal all manner of disease in this world, spiritual as well as bodily.

Within Tillich’s multidimensional unity of health, one may find room to imagine reunion with the divine without the demand for *total* bodily health. “Healing,” for instance, may not necessarily mean “curing,” but Tillich further troubles this conception of health by associating all kinds of disease with the distortion of one’s essential nature. By his own admission, Tillich’s concept of health truly emerges only in its confrontation with disease.¹¹ In *The Meaning of Health*, Tillich writes, “disease contains a partial distortion of the essential nature of [a human being].”¹² The presence of disease cannot be reconciled with one’s essential nature, but rather stands as a distortion of one’s essential nature because disease is the inability of one or more of the dimensions of a human being to function. Disease distorts the unity of a human being and thus requires reconciliation of the part of our lives that has become separated from the whole.

Tillich goes so far as to link disease with demonic powers. For Tillich, any psychic disruption of the center of a human being, from his or her wholeness, is demonic. In “The Relation of Religion and Health,” Tillich describes psychic disruptions as caused by “demonic powers” that “take possession” of the soul.¹³ Tillich then proceeds to describe both mental and bodily diseases as derived from this demonic source.¹⁴ Tillich did not believe that this possession by forces of evil is a natural event, but rather demonic possession was the result of sin and separation. He does not go so far as to say persons with bodily diseases are themselves demonic, but there can be little doubt that Tillich understood all bodily diseases to be an entirely negative result of humanity’s separation from God and, therefore, adverse to the human being’s essential nature.

Tillich goes on to give the impression that the association between feelings of guilt with disease is justified. In “The Relation of Religion and Health,” Tillich writes, “[the] possession by forces of evil is not a natural event. It is the result of divine curse that itself is the result of “sin,” i.e., of an act of separation, of rebellion in which the responsible ego participates, and which involves guilt.”¹⁵ Tillich did not believe a person was cursed with a disease because of any *particular* immoral act he or she may have initiated or participated in, but feelings of guilt should nonetheless be felt personally because all people are implicated personally in the sin of separa-

tion from God.¹⁶ All kinds of disintegration are endemic in the condition of the world because of humanity’s estrangement from God. This estrangement produces the anxiety of guilt. Tillich claims that not only is the universal feeling of guilt justified, but this feeling is heightened when connected to social, bodily, and mental diseases. Tillich writes, “A universal feeling [of guilt] is justified, and so is the feeling of guilt in connection with natural, social, bodily, and mental diseases.”¹⁷

If there remains any doubt that Tillich coordinates bodily disease with sin and guilt, in his book, *Morality and Beyond*, Tillich goes so far as to say that analogies between anti-moral acts and bodily disease are, in *all* cases, more than analogy.¹⁸ Tillich believed that immoral acts and bodily diseases were both expressions of the universal ambiguity of life wherein the processes of self-integration are continuously combated by movements toward disintegration.¹⁹ Disease remains an unambiguous indicator of all humanity’s separation from the divine in Tillich’s theology, yet Tillich fails to examine why these particular manifestations of sin would reside in the bodies of some and not others. This failure has serious implications for an entire group of people whose diseased bodies resist physical healing and thereby continue to bear the brunt of society’s projections of abnormality, sin, and guilt onto their bodies.

By connecting disease and estrangement, Tillich actually risks reinforcing parts of the Christian tradition that have symbolically or even causally linked disease with sin. The conflation of sin with disease has worked to alienate persons from their religious communities and forced them to internalize the shame that has been projected onto their bodies by society. Tillich consistently works against the conception of morality that produces this kind of shame; yet, it does appear that Tillich runs the risk of shaming people whose abnormal bodies seem to resist curative efforts by healers.

What is at stake in Tillich’s alignment of bodily disease with estrangement as opposed to finitude is the meaning one is able to derive from the suffering, physical or social, caused by one’s particular disease. Tillich placed suffering into two categories: suffering that is an expression of finitude and suffering that is a result of estrangement.²⁰ In his *Systematic Theology*, Tillich writes, “suffering is meaningful to the extent that it calls for protection and healing.... It can show the limits and potentialities of a living being.”²¹ In opposition to potentially meaning-

ful suffering, Tillich describes *meaningless* suffering as suffering that destroys the possibility of the subject's acting as subject.²² If Tillich understands bodily disease to be a result of one's estrangement from God, it would appear that he would also understand the suffering caused by disease to be meaningless.

By rendering the pain and suffering caused by disease meaningless, one may also understand this suffering to be irredeemable. With no outlet to conceptualize their suffering as potentially meaningful, those with chronic disease (who may not believe that their particular disease requires additional healing) have little opportunity to reinterpret health and wholeness in light of their own particular embodiment. Moreover, if a person's disease or disability is both unhealable and irredeemable, one may question whether Tillich has effectively limited salvation for some people. If this is the case, for the disability community, the demand of Tillich's God coincides with a tyrannical insistence of the cult of normalcy, rather than with the message of a God who bears our wounds and participates in our sufferings.

For persons living with disabling and stigmatized chronic diseases, a theology is needed that can give an account of salvation wherein the unhealable, or "abnormal" body is a vehicle for participation with God rather than an obstacle. Those who wish to see the church fully embrace persons with chronic disease need to imagine that one's physicality can enrich and enliven the other dimensions of his or her life, rather than limit them. This is the work that many modern disability theologians have begun to construct. Nancy Eiesland believed that the lived experiences of persons with physical disabilities highlight physical contingency as a frequent source of creativity and uncommon experiences of interrelationship.²³ By privileging disability, Thomas Reynolds encourages his reader to reconceive our notions of autonomy and instead understand all people as sharing "vulnerable personhood." If suffering is caused by disease or disability, Reynolds invites us to understand it as a demand for wider human solidarity.²⁴ Sharon Betcher encourages her reader to imagine that the love of life might be strengthened by the experience of illness as it might cultivate a spiritual practice of becoming mindfully, creatively attentive to the midst of life.²⁵ These three authors, as well as countless other theologians making their mark in theology through the eyes of disability, have begun to thoughtfully and creatively imagine how disability may enhance our experience of embodiment and spirituality rather than limit

them. The same work must continue to be done for the experience of chronic disease, which is also frequently stigmatized and demonized in certain theologies.

Both Tillich and disability theologians point us toward a conception of the enlivened, meaningful life, which generates a diverse and united community. This vision of community *is* the healing work of the Spirit Tillich describes and, therefore, I believe disability theology and Tillich's theology have the potential to become mutually edifying, if we move bodily disease into the category of finitude rather than estrangement. By making the rather subtle shift of chronic disease into categories of finitude the Christian community may be encouraged alter its conceptions of normalcy in light of a diverse group of bodies and develop theologies that make meaningful the experience of chronic disease. By aligning chronic disease with finitude, the church may also begin to believe that persons with chronic disease and disability have particular insight concerning the essential human predicament and provide the entire community with positive valuations of alterity, vulnerability, and dependency.

¹ See Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1995).

² Paul Tillich, "Estrangement and Reconciliation in Modern Thought" in *Theological Writings*, trans. Gert Hummel (Berlin, Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1992), 256.

³ See Paul Tillich, "The Theology of Pastoral Care" in *The Meaning of Health*, ed. Perry LeFevre (Chicago: Exploration, 1984), 129.

⁴ In his *Systematic Theology II*, Tillich refers to "sin" as the expression of "the personal character of estrangement over against its tragic side", 46.

⁵ Paul Tillich, "The Meaning of Health" in *Writings on the Philosophy of Culture*, (Berlin: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1990), 347.

⁶ Tillich, "The Meaning of Health," 351.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 352.

⁸ Tillich, "The Relation of Religion and Health: Historical Considerations and Theoretical Questions" in *The Meaning of Health* ed. Perry LeFevre (Chicago: Exploration, 1984), 19.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Tillich, "The Relation of Religion and Health," 20.

¹¹ Tillich, "The Meaning of Health," 345.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Tillich, "The Relation of Religion and Health," 18.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Tillich, "The Relation of Religion and Health," 18

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Paul Tillich, *Morality and Beyond* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox), 21.

¹⁹ Tillich, *Morality and Beyond*, 21.

²⁰ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, II.71.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Nancy Eiesland, *The Disabled God Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 47.

²⁴ Thomas E. Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion a Theology of Disability and Hospitality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2008), 105.

²⁵ Sharon V. Betcher, *Spirit and the Politics of Disablement* (Minneapolis, Fortress, 2007), 169.

In the Winter 2011 issue: Durwood Foster's banquet address and papers from the annual meeting of the Society.

**See you in
Atlanta!**

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