



# BULLETIN

of

*The North American Paul Tillich Society*

**Volume XXXII, Number 3**

**Summer 2006**

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### MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR ABOUT DUES

If you have enjoyed receiving and reading this Bulletin and other Bulletins published by the North American Paul Tillich Society, the editor urges you to fill out the enclosed dues form and return it with your payment. The cost of printing and mailing continues to rise, and it will be difficult to continue publication unless everyone in the NAPTS contributes his/her dues in a timely fashion.

Please pay your dues as soon as you can. There is also an opportunity to make a tax-exempt contribution to the North American Paul Tillich Society. If your circumstances permit, please

consider doing so. It is essential that the Society discover new forms of operating revenue, given the increase in costs in recent years. According to the University Comptroller's Office, credit cards cannot be accepted.

Many thanks as always.

### NAPTS AND AAR/SBL REGISTRATION AND HOUSING INFORMATION

The annual meeting of the North American Paul Tillich Society will take place from Friday, November 17 to Sunday, November 19, 2005, in conjunction with the annual meeting of the

American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature in Washington, D.C. For information about membership, registration, and housing, please see:

<http://www.aarweb.org/annualmeet/default.asp>

Members of the AAR/SBL will have already received their booklets about the annual meeting. You may register online, or fax or mail your forms to the AAR Office. If you do not have the booklet and the forms, you may download the forms at the website.

Please note these dates:

Supersaver rates end: September 15

Registration closes: November 10.

The Fall issue of the Bulletin will contain the complete schedule of the NAPTS Meeting and the sessions of "Paul Tillich: Issues in Theology, Religion, and Culture" at the AAR meeting. See you in Washington in November!

**ERDMUTHE (MUTIE) TILlich FARRIS  
IN HONOR OF HER 80<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY  
17 FEBRUARY 2006**

Editor's note: the editor has asked a few people who know Dr. Mutie Tillich Farris to write a brief tribute to her in the Bulletins of 2006, the year of her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. Here is the first tribute. Any one wishing to share in this tribute to Mutie, please send your words to the editor. Thank you.

I am very happy to have the opportunity to add my personal tribute to Mutie Tillich Farris on the occasion of her eightieth year anniversary. My longstanding and much treasured relationship with Mutie came through a previous close friendship with her mother. I had first met Hannah Tillich at one of the earliest meetings of NAPTS, which was held in St. Louis. We soon became fast friends and my wife, Carole, and I often visited her at her East Hampton home in Long Island.

Not long after Hannah's death and the beautiful memorial service Mutie had prepared in her honor, I had a very unusual experience while relaxing with my family on the same East Hampton beach, whose breaking surf and ocean expanse is said to have inspired Paul Tillich's concept of the Infinite. For a brief moment, I almost felt as if I were the recipient of an other worldly visitation from Hannah, as I spotted a woman walking along the beach at dusk, and wearing one of Hannah's distinctive summer straw hats. After a little closer inspection and a quick

emotional recovery, I discovered that this was not quite a peak experience; rather it was Mutie, enjoying the cool ocean breezes, while wearing some of her mother's clothing from the family home on Woods Lane. This touching display of quiet grieving and filial remembrance was my first experience of Mutie's deep and tender humanity. There would be many others to follow. This occasion also marked the beginning of a new long and cherished friendship.

In the years that followed, I frequently shared camaraderie and good conversation with Mutie, usually with other close friends of NAPTS, such get-togethers at a variety of Tillich conferences. I look back with especially fond memory at such meetings in Anaheim, San Francisco, Chicago, Quebec, and New Harmony, Indiana. I also had the privilege of sharing some very joyful occasions with her family in the Hamptons. At Columbia University in New York, she was a frequent guest of the University Seminar on Studies in Religion, which I have chaired since 1993. Also in New York, Tom Driver and I felt deeply honored when we attended the very moving and dignified, memorial service that she and her son, Ted, had organized to honor the life of her beloved daughter, Madeline.

Throughout these many years of friendship, my admiration and esteem for Mutie have only grown, as in so many varying situations—both happy and painful—she has persistently, though unobtrusively, continued to share her generosity, compassion, honesty, good humor, and courage with those who have had the privilege to know her. I know Mutie as both a quiet and a very strong person. Quiet waters, they say, run deep, and I feel sure that Paul Tillich would have been very gratified to know that his daughter, Mutie, has never lost that precious dimension of depth which was so central to his own life and thought. I hope that this praise will not prove embarrassing to Mutie—private person that she is—but this tribute gives me the chance to say something that really ought to be said.

Finally, let me take the occasion to thank Mutie for both her personal friendship and for her unflagging support and encouragement of Tillich scholarship. It is my prayer and my hope that we who are committed to preserve and foster the tradition of Paul Tillich's thought will continue to benefit from her companionship and her wisdom for many years to come.

Raymond F. Bulman  
East Hampton, New York

**CORRECTION**

The name of Tabea Roesler was inadvertently misspelled in the Spring Bulletin. The editor apologizes for the mistake.

**NEW PUBLICATIONS**

Maraschin, Jaci and Etienne A. Hiquet, editores.  
*A Forma da Religião. Leituras de Paul Tillich No Brasil.* São Bernardo do Campo, Brasil:  
Universidade Metodista de São Paulo, 2006.

O'Meara, Thomas F. "Paul Tillich and Eric Przywara at Davos." *Gregorianum* 87, 2 (2006): 227-238.

Please send information about new publications about Tillich or by members of the Tillich societies to the editor. Thank you.

**IS THAT A PRAYER?  
THE POSSIBILITY OF WORSHIP IN  
TILlich's THEOLOGY OF CULTURE**

THOMAS G. BANDY

Paul Tillich's theology of culture provides a surprisingly helpful framework with which to interpret the emergence of alternative forms of worship for postmodern people. The present boiling cauldron of spirituality that is typical of North America is particularly focused on:

- (a) The cycle of birth, death, resurrection, and new life;
- (b) The internal connection between divinity and humanity;
- (c) The purposeful limitations of time and space; the guarantee of ultimate hope.

These are all themes significant to Tillich's theology arising from the struggles he described as the three existential anxieties of fate and death, emptiness and meaninglessness, and guilt and condemnation.<sup>1</sup> Worship, for Tillich, is precipitated by ontological crisis, and not by ethical confusion or eschatological expectation. Christendom's worship attendance is declining because fewer people desire a foretaste of heavenly harmony, or no longer believe the church to be a relevant stepping-stone to social order; post-Christendom worship attendance is accelerating because more people yearn to

discover one good reason not to commit suicide tonight.

Worship in the resurgent pagan world has become a kind of microcosm for the struggle of autonomy and heteronomy, and the quest for theonomous experience.<sup>2</sup> It is this issue which lies behind Tillich's recently transcribed 1963 Earl Lectures entitled *The Irrelevance and Relevance of the Christian Message*,<sup>3</sup> and my cross-denominational experience as a church consultant in North America and Australia. Two incidents help explain my focus.

In the mid-80's (perhaps 20 years ago), I recall a past Tillich Society banquet at the University of Chicago. The guest speaker (Masao Abe) was reflecting on Tillich's dialogue with Buddhism (literally months after he delivered the Earl Lectures). In those days, the Tillich Society included leaders like Krister Stendahl and others who professionally connected the Academy and the Church. I found myself intimidatingly at table with the likes of Wolfhart Pannenberg and Langdon Gilkey, and was suddenly called upon to say grace before the meal. Astonished and dismayed, I managed (I thought) to rise to the occasion and strung together some marvelously abstract and vacuous words, to which Pannenberg muttered none-too-softly "That's a prayer?!" To my recollection, no one has invited a prayer at a Tillich banquet in the 20 years since. Yet for twenty years I have wondered if that is simply because I was so inept...or if there is something intrinsically inappropriate for disciples of Tillich *to actually worship?*

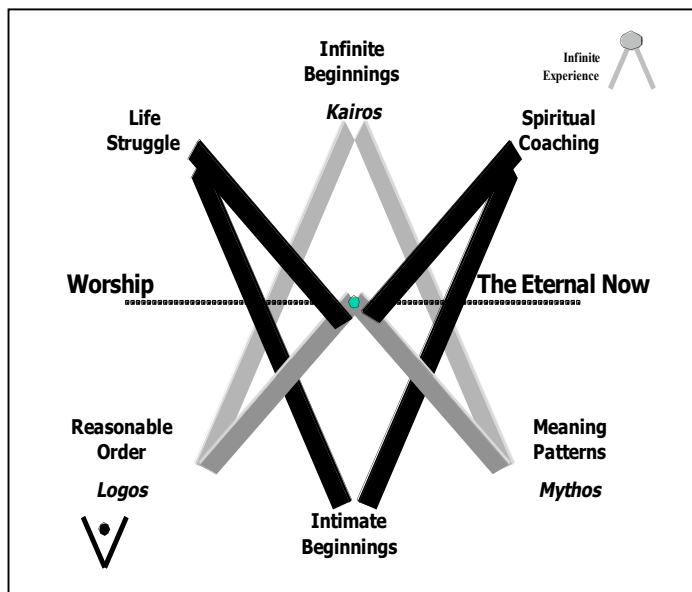
More recently, I consulted with a declining church on the outskirts of Washington, D.C. It was founded in one of the first significant planned communities of the 1960s. The church was specifically founded on the thinking of Paul Tillich, and a plaque quoting his words is located outside the sanctuary entrance beside the mission statement. Instead of a steeple, the architecture (inspired by Tillich) focuses attention on a fifty foot poured concrete pulpit that rises above the courtyard as a platform for the prophetic word. Planted on the foundation of Tillich's words, "You are accepted by that which is greater than you and the name of which you do not know," the congregation, now reduced to about 40 dysfunctional people, will soon close. Yet, is this the real Tillich? Or is this simply the American distortion of the real Tillich?

Tillich's vision of "life in the Spirit" is predicated on the motivational force and

transformational power of the intersection of the infinite and the finite that shapes the experience of “eternal now.” Without the possibility of intimate participation with God, and without the possibility of apocalyptic experience of God, life in the Spirit is reduced to vacuous abstractions and controlling dogmatism...a liberal “fundamentalism” that is merely kin to the conservative “fundamentalism” of our time. Tillich’s vision of the “eternal now” is something entirely different.

Worship is participation in the New Being, a matter of “infinite relevance for all existence.” Near the end of his life, Tillich confessed: “When I look at the actual churches, I am often horrified [by the betrayal of Spiritual Community]...But when the distortion hits me so deeply I incline to turn away from the churches, then suddenly in a little service in a small church or in an act of love inspired by...the image of Jesus, something breaks through the weakness, banality, and corruption of actual church life.”<sup>4</sup>

The following diagram is my attempt to describe the ontological crisis that precipitates authentic worship, and the images of Jesus that link the “eternal now” of worship with the “theonomous moments” of the life of the Spirit.<sup>5</sup>



The possibility of intimate participation with God is born out of the depth of reason (logos), and out of the patterns of meaning (mythos) that we invent under the condition of fallenness. Together these create an inexpressible yearning for the divine. Intimate beginnings reach out into life struggle, and compel the search for spiritual insight. The very Eros that underlies autonomous self-expression explodes in acts of worship that are filled with passion...a reasonable attempt to burst the boundaries of reason. Postmodern worship is in part an act of “desire” and self-affirmation.

The possibility of the apocalyptic experience of God (Kairos) is born out of our life long struggle with death, and out of the intuition of infinite import that shatters form and lends urgency to meaning. Together these precipitate opportunities for acceptance that surpasses rational explanation or even moral justification. The New Being reaches down into the Depth of Being, establishing the possibility of reason, and compelling the creation of patterns of meaning. The very Agape that is the nature of the Holy simultaneously uses and shatters liturgical forms. Postmodern worship is in part an experience of transformation and self-surrender.

Worship is the intersection of these two forces of nature and supra-nature. It is not an order of service, but an experience pregnant with unpredictable meaning. It is an environment that is at once both symbol and portal. Worship is symbol—a reasonable, ritual act that reminds, informs, instructs, and acculturates believers into a shared system of core values and convictions; but worship is also portal—a conduit of infinite import that is essentially non-rational and which reshapes the lifestyles of believers.

Tillich’s understanding of “The Christ” helps explain the strong Christocentric and theologically eclectic nature of postmodern worship. Worship does not *include* sacraments, but in and of itself it *becomes* a sacrament. Incarnation is the very essence of worship, symbolically expressed in the Christ. At the same time, postmodern worship follows a hidden implication of Tillich’s thought, in that worship must necessarily become radically indigenous. It must use the cultural forms of any given micro-culture in order to become the effective “symbol” that points to ultimate concern. The more worship is normalized, universalized, or standardized (as in denominational uses of common lectionaries and liturgies), the more worship ceases to be a “symbol

and portal” and becomes merely a vehicle for social enculturation and dogmatic control.

The relevance of worship is that it is inseparable from life in the Spirit. In a perfect universe, we would find ourselves like Adam and Eve eternally centered at the spot of Eden that is the perfect intersection of the infinite and finite. Under the conditions of existence, we find ourselves wandering or driven toward any one of the six points of the spiritual compass. The image of Jesus is that experience of God most relevant to our life situation at any given moment.

❖ The experience of intimacy introduces us to the Promise-Keeper, and drives us into life struggle and the search for spiritual guides;

❖ The experience of life struggle introduces us to the Healer, and drives us to seek intimacy and create patterns of meaning;

❖ The experience of spiritual coaching introduces us to the Mentor, and drives us to reasonable thought and intimate dialogue;

❖ The experience of patterns of meaning introduces us to the Vindicator, and drives us back into life struggle and the expectations for deliverance;

❖ The experience of reasonable order introduces us to the Perfect Human, and drives us toward authentic guides that can reveal Ultimate Concern;

❖ The experience of infinite beginnings introduces us to the New Being, and drives us toward reason and meaning.

Every single move in the life of the spirit crosses the plane of the eternal now. It involves the intersection of the infinite and the finite. It passes through worship as light through a lens. For postmodern people, the marks of authentic worship are that *it illumines* and *it burns*. It “illumines” as it briefly captures truth that is beyond explanation; it “burns” as it judges, shatters, and explodes our constructions of meaning.

Tillich may have been skeptical of classical North American evangelicalism, but he clearly foresaw that for worship to be relevant it must *lead somewhere*. It must motivate or equip radical acts of justice, clarity of conviction, and the power to persist (that is the essence of our life-in-between). It must inspire acts of defiance toward non-being and open a portal to new being (that is the essence of our life-on-the-edge). It must create environments of acceptance and enlightenment, fleeting though they may be (that is the essence of our life-at-peace). It is no accident that the prayer most familiar to

postmodern people is not the Lord’s Prayer, but the prayer that seeks serenity to endure, courage to change, and wisdom to know the difference.

The spectrum of spirituality in America today extends out into increasingly expanding circles of seriousness about Ultimate Concern:<sup>6</sup>

- The Spiritual Dilettantes;
- The Flaky Fringe;
- The Rationally Reserved;
- The Seriously Experimenting;
- The Radically Committed.

I think it is safe to say Tillich would be least comfortable with the first three, and most attracted by the last two. For this reason he would probably turn away from both conservative and liberal, evangelical and mainstream, expressions of worship and gravitate to what is called today the “emerging church” in all its ancient–postmodern eccentricity. The worship of this emerging church is not defined stylistically, generationally, or even missionally. It really is distinct because of its ontological recognition of the intersection of the infinite and the finite that can take place in the sanctuary, the sports arena, or Starbucks.

Worship as an expression of the “New Being” explicitly shatters five myths of modernity that, from the point of view Tillich’s “life in the spirit” have enslaved authentic worship for several hundred years.<sup>7</sup>

a) The myth of the controllable Holy. This is the modern Christendom conviction that Ultimate Concern is a function of strategic planning, rendering worship an informational experience that justifies whatever dogmatic or ideological agenda seems most urgent at the time.

b) The myth of reasonable religion. This is the conviction that Ultimate Concern is subject to scientific verification and rational explanation, rendering worship a “nice down-home, manageable, intergenerational experience of God that will powerfully motivate us to go home to lunch.”

c) The myth of therapeutic process. This is the modern Christendom conviction that Ultimate Concern is intended to psychologically prepare us for the exigencies of living, rendering worship an experience of co-dependency between needy people and leaders who have a need to be needed.

d) The myth of progressive justice. This is the modern Christendom conviction that Ultimate Concern is aimed at achieving a merely just society, rendering worship an act of political lobbying that

will condemn the rich, rescue the poor, and expand the Middle Class.

e) The myth of heavenly favors. This is the modern Christendom conviction that Ultimate Concern is really about personal advancement and corporate success, rendering worship an interactive negotiation about life insurance.

Tillich's thought has much in common with the "emerging church"...and with the radical experimentation of "emerging church" worship. The "eternal now" is a mystical moment that assumes...or better still, is passionately confident... that there is an infinite experience beyond finite experience, and that infinite experience is not indifferent to finite experience. The "eternal now" is made possible by this dual interest of the infinite and the finite in each other. The infinite seeks to fulfill itself and its purposes in and through the finite, and the finite yearns to reunite with the infinite. Worship is the microcosm of that twin desire. Tillich's task (or perhaps more rightly the challenge to Tillich's disciples) is not to justify worship as a possibility, but to explain worship as an inevitability of the ontological crisis of existence.

The spiritually yearning, institutionally alienated public believes in the paradox that there is a plane of intersection, a state of being, in which the divine can be incarnate and people can participate directly with the infinite. They know that that the infinite is *not* neutral to the finite, and that no matter how much

modernity seeks to block the intersection of the infinite and finite, the infinite will *invade* the finite, and the finite will *reach out* to the infinite, shattering all pretense of order, management, and control. The Kairos will happen, and the new being *will* emerge, because nothing can stop the combined Eros of God and the human spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> See my new book *Talisman: Global Positioning for the Soul* (Chalice Press, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> See my book *Coaching Change* (Abingdon Press, 2000) for a more complete explanation.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), 32-63.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1963) vol. 3: 249-265.

<sup>5</sup> *The Irrelevance and Relevance of the Christian Message*, ed. by A. Durwood Foster. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1996

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>7</sup> The following charts are presented and explained in detail in my new book *Talisman: Global Positioning for the Soul* (Chalice Press, 2006).

Due to a software error, the second of Dr. Bandy's diagrams could not be produced. The editor apologizes to Dr. Bandy and to the readers for this problem.

### PAUL TILlich IN JAPAN

EIKO HANAOKA

TRANSLATED BY THOMAS F. O'MEARA

FROM *DIALOG* (APRIL 2006: 21-24)

#### *I. Lectures and Courses Given by Paul Tillich in Japan*

At the beginning of 1960, Paul Tillich went to Japan and spent about two months there giving lectures and courses at various universities. Later some of his lectures were collected, edited, and translated into Japanese; there were published in 1963 as a book with the title *Culture and Religion*. After Tillich's visit and the publication of those lectures, research on the theology of Paul Tillich increased. During the time that Tillich was in Japan, I myself was a student at the Kyodai, the University of Kyoto. Destiny, or rather one might say, Anti-

Destiny, arranged things in such a way that instead of sitting at the feet of the Master and absorbing his words at that time, I was for long months in the University Hospital being treated for a tenacious infection.

The book *Culture and Religion* has two parts. In the first part, there is the essay, "The Philosophical Background of My Theology," along with three further talks on the philosophy of religion. The second part has three lectures on areas that go beyond the theme of culture and religion. The volume has an "Appendix" where there are three further articles: an impressive presentation by Tillich of some of the experiences and occurrences during his time in Japan; an overview of themes which were raised at two of his lectures; and, finally, an explanation of issues of terminology touching upon translation into Japanese.

Further works were translated into Japanese after Tillich's visit to Japan. For instance, Hiroshi

Shigeru translated in 1963 the collection of sermons *The Eternal Now*, while a volume called *Ultimate Concern—Tillich in Dialogue* was published in 1965. Michio Taniguchi translated *The Courage to Be* (1952) and the trio of M. Suzuki, M. Taniguchi and M. Doi translated the *Systematic Theology*. Moreover, a team of nineteen scholars in religious studies worked on the edition of Tillich's collected works in ten volumes. The translation of that edition, where explanations illumine the text, appeared in the years 1977 to 1979 from the prestigious Hakusuisha publishing house.

As a student of Tillich, I studied philosophy of religion intensively, first at the University of Kyoto and later in Hamburg. After the sudden death of my husband, in Japan I practiced Zen meditation within a school of Zen Buddhism attached to a temple. With this, I brought my reading of Tillich to an end and have not read Tillich since then. I have dedicated my efforts to the work of Kitao Nishida, although that should not mean that I only read Nishida.

The following pages present the philosophical background of the theology of Tillich briefly as he presented it in the lectures given in Japan, lectures in the book *Culture and Religion*. I would like to try—as a Christian who is at the same time a Buddhist—to set up a conversation between my views and those of Tillich.

First, however, I would mention three groups in Japan where the study of Tillich has been intense. There is the Tillich Research Community attached to the Seminar for the Research of Christianity at the University of Kyoto; next is the Institute for Systematic Theology at Seigakuin University; and finally the Japanese Society for Systematic Theology. The last mentioned holds scholarly conferences each year at different universities or at various meetings bringing together professors and researchers.

In *Culture and Religion*, Tillich mentions a number of philosophers who have influenced his theology. Parmenides and Plato come at the beginning. The first reached the point of thinking about “being,” while Plato drew attention to the idea of “symbol.” Furthermore, Tillich notes that “logos” as used in the Stoa entered Christian thought and became an important aspect of its expression. Finally, Tillich introduces the Neo-Platonist Plotinus's idea of ecstasy as important for indicating how one can “go beyond oneself without losing oneself.”

Among European thinkers, Tillich finds Augustine particularly important. His basic thought that truth lies in the depths of the individual soul is found also in Nicholas of Cusa and Descartes. Cusa's idea of the “*coincidentia oppositorum*” is for Tillich the basic principle for teaching about religious experience. Tillich, however, rightly notes here the dangers that are connected to this kind of thinking: for instance, in Hegel the human being immediately moves to the center of the infinite.

The marked role of the will in Augustine is found also in Duns Scotus and Jakob Böhme. With Schelling, it finds a radical expression in relationship to God. In the depths of the divine will there is also a demonic element. The full expression of this theme emerges with Nietzsche.

Tillich draws Aristotle and Kant with their intellectual approaches into this company. He treats these mainly as two who offered a thematic view of the categorical structure of thinking. After Tillich has presented his philosophical background in this way, he mentions in following pages that the fall of sin is a passage from essence to existence. The real being of the human person consists in the ambiguous mixture of essence and existence. Furthermore, he emphasizes that the idea of “salvation” is basic to all religions. In Christianity, this is realized in Christ.

At the end of his reflections about “the philosophical background of his theology,” he makes two important statements. First, the philosophers present in the background of his thinking have their own particular religious self-understanding. Second, every theologian frequently employs concepts from the area of philosophy, reaching eventually a point where these concepts are transcended.

## *II. A Comparison of Tillich's Philosophical Background with the “Absolute Nothingness” of Kitaro Nishida and the “Self-Nature” (in Japanese jítai) of Keiji Nishitani.*

As we have seen, Tillich's theology is influenced by Parmenides' understanding of Being, the view of symbol in Plato, the understanding of Logos from the Stoa, and by Plotinus's concept of ecstasy. On the other hand, the standpoint of the Japanese philosopher Kitaro Nishida (1870-1945) is in turn one of absolute nothingness, of absolute negation of all that is substantial.

(1) Nishida, basing his thinking on Mahayana Buddhism, is the first original philosopher in Japan and the founder of the school of philosophy in

Kyoto. He revived the standpoint of being in that he mediated his own standpoint of absolute nothingness as joined to love in the sense of agape and to mercy. The thought of Keiji Nishitani (1900-1990), a student of Nishida, unfolds from the foundation of self-nature (in Japanese *jitai*; in Sanskrit *tathata*). It moves along the path that can be designated by the Sanskrit word “*synyata*,” “emptiness” or “independent origination” (in Sanskrit *pratitya-samutpada*) as well as along the path of Mahayana Buddhism, which negates the substantial.

As I have already mentioned, Tillich, along with Augustine, Descartes, and Cusa, gives great significance to the self, and here he draws upon Cusa’s “*coincidentia oppositorum*.” Similarly, Nishida and Nishitani see the true self as of major importance. This leads to the idea of the absolute, infinite self-identity of self and world and of all the polarities in the spiritual realm.

(2) Nishida’s absolutely contradictory self-identity means an original identity of self and world in absolute, infinite openness. The term “absolute,” as it meets us in absolute, infinite openness, points to the transcendence of the place in which the substantial is being negated. “Infinite” means that the absolute negation in each moment lasts constantly in the mode of a discontinuous continuity. The term “contradictory” means that this identity is always contradictory when one considers it from the standpoint of the schema of subject-object.

While Tillich looks particularly to Nicholas of Cusa, Nishida and Nishitani draw on Meister Eckhart. Tillich sees being as the ground of God; Nishida and Nishitani, however, understand God as absolute nothingness, as the absolute negation of the substantial. To the extent that one conceives of being as “ultimate concern” one cannot free oneself from the subject-object schema in which everything necessarily is being objectified. In contrast, Nishida and Nishitani attempt to find liberation from the subject-object schema and to understand the self and the world from a common origin: namely, to understand them from the perspective of an absolute and infinite openness.

(3) Augustine, Duns Scotus, Jakob Böhme, and Schelling—thinkers who see the will as important—have not influenced Nishida but have had more influence on Nishitani.

(4) Nishitani was influenced by Nietzsche, someone whom Tillich considers important for the complete development of the demonic.

(5) Aristotle and Kant are not as positively evaluated by Nishida and Nishitani as by Tillich. Nishitani, nonetheless, considers the interior common sense (“*sensus communis*”) of Aristotle to be important, as his book of studies on Aristotle (*Aristotelesu Ronkō* [1987]) shows that the Aristotelian “*sensus communis*” played an important role, as Nishitani in 1982 finally reached in his essay, “Emptiness and Identity (*sive*),” a culminating standpoint for considering self-nature.

(6) It would seem that Nishida and Nishitani agree with Tillich’s conviction that all philosophers have to do with religion, with the realm of the unqualified; he agrees similarly that theologians use philosophical concepts only eventually to go beyond them—as Tillich writes in *Culture and Religion*. What I would like to do now, drawing on what I have just presented on Tillich’s time in Japan and on the thinking of Nishida and Nishitani, is to develop three points about research on Tillich in the East and the West.

First, Tillich’s thinking posits “being” as its ground, while the thought of both of the members of the Kyoto school of philosophy, Nishida and Nishitani, has absolute nothingness, emptiness for a ground. This negates absolute being as the substantial; that is, the eternal, universal, and unchanging are negated.

Second, the translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into the Greek Septuagint made (with some mistakes in translation) a static God out of a dynamic God, a Greek and Platonic God (as Thorleif Boman [1894-1978] described in his work *Das hebräische Denken im Vergleich mit dem griechischen* [1954]). For the Hebrew verb “*hayah*” speaks of becoming, of event, of effect, while the Greek “*einai*” means static being. The understanding of God in Nishida and Nishitani is essentially close to the dynamic approach of the Hebrew Old Testament where God is active in becoming and happening; it is not close to the static God of the Greek language.

With Nishida and Nishitani, God is the origin of the personal and the impersonal God. With this I consider the possibility of how there can be common aspects and points for relationship between God as the ground of being with Tillich and God as absolute nothingness and as the absolute infinite openness, and at the same time the origin of the personal and impersonal God. Tillich speaks in his *The Courage to Be* [1952] of a “God above the God of Theism.” Furthermore, he speaks of God “being present in a



hidden way in each divine-human encounter.” Tillich makes the *coincidentia oppositorum* of Cusa into a primary principle of his thinking. If we could show that God presented by Tillich as the ground of being has a unity with God as absolute nothingness then we have found a link between Christianity and Buddhism. Putting it another way, we would have found a link between God as the ground of being and God as absolute nothingness. Then we have taken a step forward in the dialogue between religions, a move forward along the way of world peace.

*Translator's Bibliography:*

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**THE UNMOVING MOVEMENT:  
EVANGELICAL WORSHIP AFTER THE  
‘EMERGING CHURCH’ AND NEO-  
CORRELATIONAL THEOLOGY**

JEFF KEUSS

**Introduction**

What has “emerged” in the “emerging church” movement through the prolific writings of Brian McLaren, Dan Kimbell, Leonard Sweet, Rick Warren and others is merely a new form of correlational theology—or what I will term “neo-correlational theology”—that has its particular roots

in the work of University of Chicago theologians Paul Tillich and Don Browning. This “emergent” movement draws some strength from a renewed interest in Tillich’s systematic and methodological presentation of what he termed a “theology of culture” first addressed in his 1919 address “On the Idea of a Theology of Culture” (“Über die Idee einer Theologie der Kultur”). According to Tillich, the task of theology of culture is to produce “a general religious analysis of all cultural creations; it provides a historical-philosophical and typological classification of the great cultural creations according to the religious substance realized in them; and it produces from its own concrete religious standpoint the ideal outline of a culture penetrated by religion.” While it does not directly appeal to Tillich’s influential

insights and legacy, the praxiological outworking of Emergent discussions regarding “authentic worship” bears such a strong familial resemblance that makes this reflection apropos.

“Emerging Church” is the collective term for the individuals in Western culture who are emerging from this process of the theological and subjective deconstruction and reconstruction of Christianity while continuing to find community amidst this process of deconstruction and reconstruction. Emerging Church groups have typically contained some or all of the following elements:

- A minimalist and decentralized organizational structure.
- A flexible and at time “mongrel” approach to theology whereby individual differences in belief and morality are celebrated and accepted with difference as normative.
- A holistic view of the role of the church in society. This can mean anything from greater emphasis on fellowship in the structure of the group to a higher degree of emphasis on social action, community building or Christian outreach.
- A desire to reanalyze the Bible against the context with the goal of revealing a multiplicity of valid perspectives rather than a single valid interpretation
- A high value placed on creating communities built out of the creativity of those who are a part of each local body.

The multi-valent approach to grounding some operational definition for “Emerging Church” only serves to further exemplify this anti-movement movement. A recent Master’s thesis analyzing the Emergent Church movement operationally defined the phrase “emergent church” as a “mood, generative conversation, dialogue, phenomenon, even as a friendship amongst its church leaders that share common features.”<sup>1</sup> Consider the following response from a pastor asked to define what it means to be an “emergent church:”

Emerging church is a passion for people who are stuck with a congregation of people who don’t understand half of what they say. Emerging church has indeed emerged from the big stone doors of the so-called local church to move themselves down the road to the pub. The emerging church can now express themselves in the language they use (graphics, candles, trance music, beer, whatever)...To me, that’s what it seems to be. It’s a radical redecoration, break up all the furniture and stick it back together again,

take all the bits done within a church setting and make them make sense for their generation, their cultural context.<sup>2</sup>

This “radical redecoration” includes an embrace of paradox and uncertainty with regard to:

- constantly changing philosophical understanding of subjectivity, from modern to postmodern, from a world of absolutes and certainty to a world of questions and searching, of challenge and anxiety, of opportunity and danger.
- constantly changing social and economic systems in the midst of a growing global economy and the rise of the internet and other global media make the world seem smaller and more connected, yet also more fragmented and tense.
- A rabid embrace of constantly changing spiritualities as religions of the world cope with new challenges and opportunities...religious and ethnic strife...the loss of confidence in traditional authorities...the shift of Christianity’s strength from the global north to the global south.

As some of these more broad descriptions certainly show, the “emergent church” movement is aligning itself with what Tillich alluded to in his prolific writing. Theologically what is arising in the “emergent movement” frames with Tillich in numerous ways, but most clearly seen in the meta-question of religious form in relation to content and meaning. As Tillich makes clear in *On the Idea of a Theology of Culture*, Religion is not conceived as one cultural function among many. Rather, religion is the directedness toward the unconditional depth of meaning in each of these cultural functions. Tillich writes in *On the Idea of a Theology of Culture* that “[t]hrough existing realities, through values, through personal life, the meaning of unconditional reality becomes evident...before which personality and community are shattered in their own self-sufficient being and value.” The unconditioned depth of cultural functions is “not a new reality, alongside or above other things.” It is not a being, nor the substance or totality of beings; “it is—to use a mystical formula—that which is above all beings which at the same time is the absolute Nothing and the absolute Something.” This turn to the existential, mystical, and apophatic in Tillich’s *Theology of Culture* is at the core of the “emergent church” move toward the “organic vintage-faith approach” to worship for the “post-seeker-sensitive” which is grounded in the non-foundational. Critiquing what he terms the “modern linear approach” to worship that has everything planned and focused on “the

message as the focal point and centerpiece of the service,” Dan Kimbell, in his book *The Emerging Church*, states that the “organic vintage-faith approach” provides a form of worship as “gathering” that highlights “the experiential...[that] is woven into and flows throughout the gathering as the focal point and centerpiece.”

The methodology of cultural engagement in and through worship for the emergent church movement is drawn from the dialectic methodology central to Tillich’s *Theology of Culture* where authentic religious experience is found amidst the triadic interplay of content, form, and meaning (*Gehalt*), to which he links the terms autonomy, heteronomy, and theonomy. *Content* denotes something objective in its simple existence. The act of giving form to content creates a recognizable structure within the cultural sphere. *Meaning* is something else again: it is the depth-meaning, the spiritual substance of a cultural product. In a traditional formulation of Tillich’s paradigm, Content is accidental, meaning is essential, and form mediates between content and import. The accent placed on this formulation methodologically *vis à vis* the Emergent church movement is a distinctly therapeutic one whereby the *content* of cultural engagement is deeply *subjective* rather than *objective*. In this “neo-correlational” turn, the Tillichian methodology is employed in the manner described by Stephen Pattison as a “critical conversation” rather than a “critical correlation”—in short, culture has something to say—let them who have ears, hear.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the ever-burgeoning literature in discussion surrounding the Emerging church movement, the notion of made clear through “emergent church” writers in Brian McLaren and Leonard Sweet’s *The Church in Emerging Culture* and Dan Kimbell’s *Emerging Worship* where the revelation of a predominant meaning consists in the fact that the form becomes more and more inadequate to the meaning. Meaning in its overflowing abundance shatters the form meant to contain it. In their book *Alternative Worship: Resources from and for the Emerging Church*, Jonny Baker and Doug Gay frame the direction of “emergent worship” as “hammering out what it means to be the gathering people of God—post-scientism, post-rationalism, and, most importantly, post-Christendom; what it is to worship God when gods are ubiquitous and every god-story, valid.”<sup>4</sup> This “hammering out” of form via the overabundant surplus of valid “god-story” is akin to Tillich’s

notion of the authentically pre-eminent form of religiously charged cultural products readily shattering and reforming.

In this regard, let me outline three Tillichian returns foundational to most discourse that is “emergent,” which are implied but not overtly noted in “emergent” discourse yet remain engrained to a distinct Tillichian heritage and the contemporary Emergent resonance:

\* Schleiermacher’s notion of “feeling” as an authentic categorical form of knowledge forged through radical reflexivity is the proper domain for authentic worship in the Emergent movement.

\* As underscored in Tillich’s *Theology of Culture*, the church as “emergent” is profoundly imminent and therefore necessarily social, positivistic, and historical.

\* Theological anthropology is understood primarily through our freedom over and (at times) against the necessity of redemption.

1. First, receptivity to the manifestations of God is possible in immediate self-consciousness, or “feeling,” which is the proper domain of authentic faith. This *metanoia* from the priority of reason and rationalism in the emergent movement has numerous reference points, but the corrective turn taken by Schleiermacher in reference to Kantian metaphysics marks a turn akin to the anti-Enlightenment turn taken by the Emergent and is therefore important to review. The heritage of the inward, affective turn of radical subjectivity is rooted in the notable quotation by St. Augustine in this regard: *Noli foras ire, in teipsum redi; in interiore homine habitat veritas* (“Do not go outward; return within yourself. In the inward man dwells truth”).<sup>5</sup> Augustine is in line with Plato before him in his search for a unifying principle under and throughout the oppositions and complex divisions of the world. But Augustine draws a new direction in his avocation of *in interiore homine* as the *habitat veritas*.

Dwelling in this modality of being in a radically reflexive repose, Augustine is not a precursor to the Cartesian tautological turn where one “thinks themselves thinking” nor the Donald Rumsfeld aphorism, “It is what it is,” but the Schliermachian turn of “feel ourselves feeling.”

Schleiermacher claims that “feeling” is the mode of receptivity in which humans are both open to the interactions between rationality (mind) and sentience (being) as well as open to the absolute ground of those interactions. He defines feeling as “immediate self-consciousness,” which removes feeling from the

sphere of changeable emotions to the deeper one of what Heidegger will later call “fundamental moods” (*Stimmungen*) and Tillich will later call “ultimate concern.” Schleiermacher claims that feeling is not merely subjective self-awareness, but is genuinely intentional—it points us to not merely ourselves, but toward that within which, noting St. Paul’s praxiological devotional refrain in Acts, “we live and move and have our being.” An intuition of what is felt always accompanies feeling. As such, feeling is the primordial unity of the subject-object interactions. Feeling is the proper domain of the primordially receptive nature of human being. And, crucially, feeling as it “emerges” is the proper domain of authentic worship in that the recovery of the unity of subject-object relations both within ourselves and beyond.<sup>6</sup>

2. Akin to Tillich’s summation of a *Theology of Culture*, to be “emergent” is necessarily social, positive, and historical. In the fourth of his *Speeches*, Schleiermacher says, “Once there is religion, it must necessarily be social. That not only lies in human nature but also is pre-eminently in the nature of religion.”<sup>7</sup> In this regard, human beings have a desire to communicate religious emotions and meanings to each other. From this communitarian interplay, historical religious communities arise. Accordingly, emergent forms of worship are therefore infinite and immeasurable by this understanding, but in addition, authentic worship, akin to Schleiermacher’s argument regarding religion, must have a principle of individualization in itself, for otherwise it could not exist at all and be perceived.<sup>8</sup> According to this principle, worship cannot appear in the world as such—there is no natural form of worship. Worship necessarily appears in the world as a concrete historical community as vocation—a “called out” (or “thrown out” in “Heideggarian–speak”) community that forms and overcomes divisions between self and other and self and God. Moreover, there are necessarily a plurality of authentic worship forms and practices, that is—a multi-valiant understanding of a theology of worship that draws from and supports a myriad of sources, based upon the plurality of possible intuitions and feelings engrafted into the diverse firmament we find ourselves (and are found) in. As Schleiermacher notes in *On Mission: Speeches to Its Cultural Despisers*, he applauds rather than laments the condition of pluralism that exists among the multiplicity of human communities.

3. Emergent worship aligns itself with Tillich via in his reading of Schleiermacher through an essentialist theological anthropology that grounds and empowers a finite human freedom under the sovereignty of an infinitely free and loving God. In so-called Emergent communities, radical human freedom is not only acknowledged but also celebrated. As Schleiermacher rigorously construes human freedom as limited, finite, and relative freedom, in contrast to Kant’s moral philosophy, so does the Emergent movement uphold a robust liberty core to humanity that challenges both Reformed and Wesleyan notions of atonement. As we see through the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the notion of transcendental freedom stands at the center of both Kant’s theoretical and practical critiques. For Kant, transcendental freedom is the mere, non-contradictory idea of an absolute beginning point out of which a rational subject (or moral agent) can produce an object (an action as real state of affairs) quite independently of the natural nexus of cause and effect. As rational beings, we are conscious of ourselves as acting and thereby bringing about new states of affairs within the totality of the world and its causal structure. Therefore, according to Kant, the fact that humans intervene in the causal structure requires transcendental freedom as its necessary condition. In addition, we humans are conscious that we are accountable for our actions, which implies that we are conscious of an *a priori* moral norm by which we measure the moral worth of what is. As rational beings, we can reflect on the felt “oughtness” which obligates us, and we can deduce the supreme principle of morality, the moral law, along with the categorical form of its imperative. What is more, we can test the moral worth of our actions by universalizing our maxims in accordance with universal and necessary condition of the possibility of any moral accountability and of any moral action. The central point for us is that Kant identifies the essence of religion with morality. To be religious is to understand the moral law as if it were a divine command. Religious experience for Kant is to feel reverence for the moral law. In contrast, Schleiermacher offers a stark alternative, and it is his program that is carried forward into the legacy of an emergent theology of worship.

In his early essay on human freedom (*Über die Freiheit*), Schleiermacher abandoned the idea of transcendental freedom in favor of a more limited notion of freedom ultimately grounded in the religious response to the infinite whole as it reveals

itself in finite reality. In contrast to Kant, Schleiermacher turned to the empirical experience of the moral agent. Schleiermacher argued against Kant that action is always determined by our strongest desire. All human action is moved by instincts or impulses, but this does not mean that reason is impotent in its deliberations about choices. He claimed that there is a properly moral impulse within the actual life experience of the empirical self. This moral impulse competes with other impulses in the deliberations of the agent to become the incentive of action. The originating cause of moral action, therefore, lies within the empirical self, rather than outside it. With this early critique of Kant's idea of transcendental freedom, Schleiermacher brought together what Kant had sundered—namely, sensible inclinations and moral duty—by making the moral impulse one of the affective desires that can determine a moral act. In so doing, Schleiermacher did not deny the moral law, but rather claimed that the law is given through the sentient experience of the self and must be interpreted by it.<sup>9</sup> In my view, this is a brilliant move that is consistent with the previous steps in manoeuvring between idealism and empiricism-positivism.<sup>10</sup>

This level of unbridled imminent freedom as the foundational aspect of our humanity informs emergent church writers in regard to their unilateral correlational methodology that begins with a focus on what worshipping individuals and congregations “want and need” and then articulating a theology of worship that responds to and fulfills those wants and needs through a call to human freedom toward others and God. In this way, the correlation model drawn from Tillich attempts to find a better way of making Christian worship meaningful and relevant both to the congregation and to the culture at large. Drawing upon recent re-imaginings of the Celtic tradition, the “emergent church” movement argues for a theology of worship that is contrasted with what they term the “Roman model” of “finding out what God says” and then “applying” it to specific human situations. Such a traditional approach (or what Dan Kimbell terms “consumer church” model) is seen as dictatorial and restrictive, allowing no room for human meaning and response, and, more importantly, ignoring the complex web of reality that human beings already inhabit, and into which the theologian is attempting to speak the knowledge of God.

### Don Browning

In a similar vein of post-evangelical critique of the modern church brought forward by the “emergent church” movement, Don Browning in *A Fundamental Practical Theology* (FPT) responded to this perceived deficiency of authenticity in practice by detailing a thorough practice-to-theory-to-practice Tillichian model for a theology of worship within three specific local congregations that predates the ‘emerging church’ movement yet bears important points of contemporary reference.

Browning spends some time in *A Fundamental Practical Theology* justifying both the necessity of congregational studies and the practical theology with which such studies are associated. He suggests that religious communities carry a sense of tradition, or “group memory” that often serves to balance the corrosive effects of modern Western individualism. They are in this sense, carriers of a crucial “practical wisdom.” He writes:

...Western societies are desperate to find ways to make shared and workable decisions about the common good and the common life. The twin realities of modernity and liberalism have worked against the maintenance of shared traditions, social narratives, and communal identities. When it comes time to decide an issue about the common good, shared assumptive worlds are so fragmented that struggle, often unproductive, invariably ensues.... [After bouncing between the two poles of blind custom or purely theoretical theology], we now have returned to the category of the practical in search of a shared praxis that will enable us to either reconstruct tradition or learn to exercise our practical wisdom without it. These seem to be the two basic choices. In each case—the exercise of practical wisdom with or without tradition—the debate is over competing images of what is variously called practical wisdom, practical reason, or *phronēsis*.<sup>11</sup>

Browning elaborates on this idea of tradition by contrasting a “popular” view of theology with what has actually developed in contemporary theological circles. He notes that to many academics, “theology” is a mysterious and arcane discipline, and to speak of such a thing as “practical theology” conjures up echoes of “practical astrology” or “practical alchemy.” Akin to Emergent self-understanding, practical theology as articulated by Browning is to be a reflection on the historical self-understanding of

a particular religious tradition, a reflection that wrestles with expressions of faith that involve the language of myth, story, symbol, and metaphor. Browning notes by way of contrast the neo-orthodox theology of Karl Barth, which, while more contemporary than the Scholastics, still involves the authoritative model of God's self-disclosure to a receptive (meaning "passive") Christian church. By way of analogy, think of a physician who prescribes a cure for a patient without actually going through the careful rigors of a full medical diagnosis. This authoritative model that Browning implicitly rejects actually finds its way back into his congregational studies at several key points. He refers to Barth in this regard in support of his core thesis:

Although contemporary theology is less rationalistic, it may not seem less apodictic, impractical, and unrelated to the average person. A theologian as recent as Karl Barth saw theology as the systematic interpretation of God's self-disclosure to the Christian church. There was no role for human understanding, action, or practice in the construal of God's self-disclosure. In this view, theology is practical only by applying God's revelation as directly and purely as possible to the concrete situations of life. The theologian moves from revelation to the human, from theory to practice, and from revealed knowledge to the application.<sup>12</sup>

Notice that the term "revelation" is fused to the terms "apodictic" (incontrovertibly true), "theory," "impractical," and "unrelated to the average person." It is placed in direct opposition to human understanding, action, and practice. Curiously enough however, when Browning later recounts a series of analytical descriptions of a failing church congregation, he observes that each description, while striving for objectivity, implicitly compares the congregation to an ideal of what a church should embody. I would argue here in passing that such a normative ideal is only possible if we incorporate at least a few bricks from traditional revelatory theology into our practical theological edifice. xx

Browning elaborates on his disagreement with Karl Barth by observing, along with hermeneutical writers such as Hans-Georg Gadamer, that the theologian does not approach God, Scripture, and the historic witness of the church like an empty slate or a Lockean *tabula rasa*, waiting to be plugged in to a concrete situation like some kind of announcing angel. Akin to the voicing of "emergent thinkers," Browning would argue that we are situated already

within a specific time and culture, bringing to the texts and practices of our faith a whole complex of often-unquestioned assumptions. He uses the term "theory-laden" to describe these assumptions and practices, pointing out that

We are so embedded in our practices, take them so much for granted, and view them as so natural and self-evident that we never take time to abstract the theory from the practice and look at it as something in itself.<sup>13</sup>

This changes when a religious community hits a crisis of some kind. As a community moves from stasis to paradox and liminality, it begins to ask questions about its practices which seem to be failing. It attempts to describe these practices from a variety of viewpoints in order to understand the questions precipitated by the crisis. Eventually, the community re-examines the texts and events that constitute the source of the norms and ideals that guide its practices, questioning its own inherited tradition and normative sources in light of the questions engendered by the crisis. Here the decision is often made whether to find new possibilities and interpretations from within the tradition, or break with the past and look for answers outside of traditional boundaries. Browning notes that traditional or "confessionally oriented" communities may stop here, while more critically oriented groups may go on to devise various tests for the practical adequacy of these new meanings. Finally, these new meanings and practices will be implemented and continue until the next crisis, whereupon the whole process begins again. To use Browning's terms, the movement is from *a crisis of present theory-laden practice to a retrieval of normative theory-laden practice to the creation of a more critically held theory-laden practice*. In short, theology is re-envisioned as a movement from practice to theory and back again to practice.

What remains to be seen in the current movement called "Emergent" is whether or not an approach re-imagined as "neo-correlational theology" drawing upon the tradition of Tillich and Browning actualized through the Emerging Church movement tacitly relies upon a more traditional theology that it explicitly rejects. The challenge addressed by Browning and intimated throughout Tillich's profound reflections on culture is the difficulty in maintaining that praxio-centric nexus of engaging traditions of faith and the immediacy of culturally grounded worship without becoming traditionalism *par excellence*.

<sup>1</sup> Aaron Flores, "An Exploration of the Emerging Church in the United States: The Missiological Intent and Potential Implications for the Future," thesis submitted for MA in Religion at Vanguard University, May 2005, [http://www.thevoiz.com/media/aoflores\\_ecstudy0605.pdf](http://www.thevoiz.com/media/aoflores_ecstudy0605.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Anna Dodridge, "I Am Not Involved in the Emergent Church," <http://www.emergingchurch.info/stories/annadodridge/index.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Pattison, "Some Straw for the Bricks" in Woodward, James and Stephen Pattison, eds. *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology* (London: Blackwells, 2000) p. 139ff.

<sup>4</sup> Baker, Jonny and Doug Gay, *Alternative Worship: Resources from and for the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 16

<sup>5</sup> Saint Augustine, *De vera religione* [On True Religion], XXXIX, 72, in *Augustine: Early Writings*, trans. John H.S. Burleigh (London: SCM Press, 1953), 262. "What obstacle then remains to hinder the soul from recalling the primal beauty which it abandoned, when it can make an end of its vices? The Wisdom of God extends from end to end with might. By wisdom, the great Artificer knit his works together with one glorious end in view. His goodness has no grudging envy against any beauty from the highest to the lowest, for none can have being except him alone. So that no one is utterly cast away from the truth who has in him the slightest visage of truth. What is it about bodily pleasure that holds fast? You will find that it is agreeableness. Disagreeable things beget grief and agreeable things beget pleasure. Seek therefore the highest agreeableness. Do not go outward; return within yourself. In the inward man dwells truth.... It [agreeableness] has to do no seeking, but you reach it by seeking, not in space, but by a disposition of mind, so that the inward man may agree with the indwelling truth in a pleasure that is not low and carnal but supremely spiritual." *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> In the famous second speech, Schleiermacher wrote, "Mission's essence is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling. It wishes to intuit the universe, wishes devoutly to overhear the universe's own manifestations and actions, longs to be grasped and filled by the universe's immediate influences in childlike passivity." Thus mission is different from morality and metaphysics. *On Mission: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, introduction, translation, and notes by Richard Crouter (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 134

<sup>9</sup> For Schleiermacher the ethical life is a free process of *Bildung*. The moral agent freely cultivates moral sensibilities and nurtures his or her character so that he or she may recognize both appetitive and spiritual impulses, deliberate about consequences of actions, and choose among impulses. Schleiermacher claims that the self cannot step out of its own finitude to do more than this. Human agents must work with the actual finite characters and circumstances in which they find themselves. In saying so, Schleiermacher does not deny an important role to a notion of a relative capacity of freedom to make oneself into the unique individual one wants to be. Morality is thus not grounded in pure practical reason in isolation from sensible inclinations, but rather is grounded in the empirical constitution of the self as fundamentally receptive and capable of moral development.

<sup>10</sup> For Schleiermacher the receptive power of feeling is the ground of both knowing and doing; it ensures the unity of theoretical and practical reason. Why is this? Both knowing and doing presuppose givenness—on the one hand, the givenness of objects that the self strives to know, and on the other hand the givenness of situations which call for the self to act. Feeling is the capacity to receive givenness, and hence it is the condition of the possibility of knowing and doing for finite, sentient creatures. As such, however, feeling is also the empirical ground of relative freedom for Schleiermacher. In feeling, the self is immediately aware of itself and thereby is immediately aware of the primordial unity between subject and object. In feeling, the self is also immediately aware of itself as responding to the infinite world of givenness, including the direct encounter with other human beings. In feeling, the self has an accompanying intuition of the whole universe that is not primarily intellectual or moral but is affective at the deepest level. In the feeling and intuition of the living universe, the infinite in the finite, we have the essence of mission. In this vision of religious identity, all supernaturalism is left behind; all appeals to transcendent metaphysics fall silent, but a truly human freedom is thereby grounded and empowered.

<sup>11</sup> Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 3-4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 5

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 6

**Please send any unpublished papers  
from the 2005 meeting to the editor.**

**MANIFESTATIONS OF THE SPIRIT:  
ENGAGING TILlich'S ECCLESIOLOGY AS A  
SOURCE FOR PUBLIC THEOLOGY**

LAURA J. THELANDER

The purpose of this paper is to explore the resources offered by Tillich's mature ecclesiology as developed in his *Systematic Theology* for the sake of framing a viable and vital public ecclesiology within the North American context. As a theologian who attended to the truth and interpretation of the Christian message while critically engaging the wider cultural context, Tillich serves as an invaluable guide for contemporary American churches as they consider their relations to the wider society.

In laying the groundwork for the substance of this paper, I will begin by offering a few introductory comments that define terms and identify some of my working assumptions.

### **Defining a Public Theology**

First is the matter of defining what I mean by public theology. I do not presume to break any new ground in light of standard treatments on this subject, nor will I be engaging the numerous debates concerning the proper status and definition of public theology.<sup>1</sup> Rather I endorse and draw upon David Tracy's broad rendering of public theology as described and developed in *The Analogical Imagination*.<sup>2</sup> There, Tracy aims to overcome the privatization of faith by restoring theology to its public place within society, academy, and church. This paper concentrates specifically on the public sphere of church as I explore Tillich's ecclesiology and identify its resources for an engaged yet critical participation in the world. Such ecclesial engagement of the world is shaped by the overarching purpose of contributing to the common good of society and the flourishing of the human spirit.

### **Present-Day Challenges for Protestant Ecclesiology in North America**

Second, I want to sketch briefly what I understand to be common pitfalls that plague ecclesiology within the North American context. I summarize these pitfalls or obstacles according to two categories of reductionisms and extremisms:

reductionisms have to do with matters internal to church life while extremes pertain to the church's relation to the world.<sup>3</sup>

I identify two kinds of reductionisms. The first is what I call institutional reductionism. Particularly among mainline Protestant denominations that face the reality of dwindling memberships and fear of increasing irrelevancy, there exists the temptation to lose sight of theological essentials with regard to ecclesiology so that discussions about the nature of the church too often become merely human attempts to shore up the resources of the church through a fixation upon institutional status, structures, and orders of ministries.

The second is sociological reductionism that plagues mainline and nondenominational churches alike where faith is privatized and particular congregations are merely an aggregate of individuals who often share a common ethnic identity or like-minded political viewpoints or belong to a similar socio-economic class. Such an ecclesiology of homogeneity finds itself trapped in the present conditions of the moment, often detached from the living Christian tradition in all of its fullness.

Now turning to churches' external relations with the greater world, two extremes are to be avoided. The first is a sectarian withdrawal from the world that is marked by a general suspicion or even a radical denunciation of culture. The other extreme is theocracy, in which churches and affiliated religious movements seek to establish their particular religious convictions as the law of the land. These theocratic efforts to assume control over all realms of societal life are justified in the name of God. Both extremes are ultimately world negating.

In contrast to these distorted expressions of ecclesiology, Tillich charts a faithful and fruitful way of being church that honors the tradition without succumbing to reprivatization, and engages the world with humility and courage as it proclaims an evangelical message.

### **Why Tillich?**

Before moving on to the specific contributions of Tillich's ecclesiology, I want to make the case for the particular value in focusing upon Tillich as a public theologian and, more specifically, the reasons for focusing on his ecclesiology. As a true public intellectual, Tillich navigated the contours of the Christian tradition and the broader culture, thereby establishing himself as a theologian of culture and



formulating his method of correlation that holds creative possibilities for a public theology. Tillich has been regarded and engaged as a “philosopher of religion and a speculative metaphysician with religious interests.”<sup>4</sup> Far less frequently, though, has Tillich been considered a theologian for the church. Yet as he attests to in the first volume of his systematic theology, “the church is the ‘home’ of systematic theology. Here alone do the sources and the norms of theology have actual existence.”<sup>5</sup> In the words of David Kelsey, “Tillich’s theology is intended to be confessional Church theology.”<sup>6</sup>

More specifically, in terms of ecclesiology, Tillich’s work on the doctrine of the church has not been thoroughly appreciated, even though it constitutes one of the largest sections in his theological system. As developed in volume three, we encounter the remarkable breadth of his view of the Church: its essence, ambiguities, interior life, external functions, and relations to the world.<sup>7</sup> While Catholics have engaged him as a church theologian and explored his contributions to traditional doctrinal loci,<sup>8</sup> more often than not, Tillich’s theology has been the object of criticism among Protestant theologians for diluting the distinctive content of Christianity.<sup>9</sup> While it will be necessary to address this serious charge lodged against Tillich in terms of his ecclesiology, this paper’s principal task is to take Tillich seriously as a church theologian.

### **Tillich’s Material Contributions to Ecclesiology**

These preliminary comments prepare for the substance of this paper that considers the material contributions to ecclesiology made by Tillich that would serve the conversations of a public theology. Identity (character) and Expression (function) are the two primary headings under which I encapsulate the essence of Tillich’s ecclesiology.

#### *Identity: Essential Character of the Church*

Defined at the most basic level, the church’s identity is a “community of those who affirm that Jesus is the Christ.”<sup>10</sup> At the same time, Tillich repeatedly asserts that, “Christ is not the Christ without the church.”<sup>11</sup> As such, the relationship between Jesus the Christ and the church is structured in correlative terms.

The Spiritual Presence in the New Being that appears in Jesus the Christ is the same Spirit at work among church communities. Therefore, faith and love, which we encounter as perfectly united in the

life of Jesus the Christ, are the two primary manifestations of the Spiritual Presence. Here in the church we find the presence and certainty of faith even in the midst of doubt and the creation of love expressed in mutual acceptance and service. Insofar as the church has its origins in the Spiritual Presence, the church’s distinctive identity as the community of faith and love is created and determined solely by this encounter with the divine Spirit.<sup>12</sup>

#### *Expression: Functions of the Living Church*

Having defined the essential core identity of the church, I move on to examine Tillich’s presentation of the functions that necessarily express this identity. These functions “flow” from the interior life of faith and love.<sup>13</sup> As Tillich notes, “Each of these functions is an immediate and necessary consequence of the nature of a church. They must be at work where there is a living church, even if periodically they are more hidden than manifest.”<sup>14</sup> These functions are never lacking in the church, although the forms they take may be different.

Tillich identifies four primary functions of the church.<sup>15</sup> The first three are essentially related to the church’s fundamental identity as a community of faith and love.

The first is the function of constitution that pertains to the foundation of churches in the Spiritual Community. Churches are brought and held together under the conditions of existence through the constitutive function of receiving, of being grasped by the Spirit. Every church is dependent on the activity and presence of God’s Spirit. This Spiritual Presence is understood to be mediated through designated means, namely the preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments that normally occur within the event of worship and acts of pastoral care.

The function of expansion is related to the universal claim of the Spiritual Community. The universality of the Spiritual Community demands this expanding function of the churches.<sup>16</sup> Under this category, Tillich identifies missions, education, and evangelistic preaching as the primary expressions of the Spiritual Community’s universal claim.

The function of construction is related to the actualization of the spiritual potentialities of churches and their individual members. Tillich identifies this constructive function as the ways in which the church “builds its life by using and transcending the function of the [individual’s] life

under the dimension of the spirit.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, this constructive function is full participation by churches and individuals in cultural creativity and life in all of its dimensions. Here we find, among others, the work of artists and theologians who seek to express the meaning of life through aesthetic symbols and language.

Most significant for this paper’s argument that Tillich’s ecclesiology provides a world-engaging public theology is the fourth function identified by him, the function of relating.<sup>18</sup> This function of relation is explored through the three-fold offices of Christ. Using the schema of Christ’s priestly, prophetic, and royal functions, Tillich provides a dynamic framework for describing and interpreting the mutual relations and influences between churches and other communities that collectively contribute to a theonomous culture.<sup>19</sup> It is within this section that Tillich’s ecclesiology offers the richest possibilities for a public theology. It should be noted that Tillich is not offering specific proposals for concrete actions. Rather he is formulating and identifying the principles that might frame interactions between churches and other social groups.

Let us look more closely at these relating functions, that is, those actions resulting from churches’ encounters with other sociological groups. Note that in each case, Tillich identifies the relating functions between the churches and other groups as mutual interactions.<sup>20</sup> As he appropriates the classic schema of Christ’s three-fold offices, Tillich attributes to both churches and other social groups the priestly, prophetic, and royal functions derived from the Christ.

The priestly function is described as the “silent interpenetration” of priestly substance, the “continuous radiation of the Spiritual essence of the churches into all groups of the society in which they live.”<sup>21</sup> Stated more simply, the very existence of churches, especially in the ways that they are determined by the Spiritual Presence, changes the society and culture around them. Remember, though, the influence here is mutual. Similarly, the churches are being shaped in ways both obvious and subtle by emerging and developing cultural forms of society whether they are aware of it or not. The priestly function reflects a kind of cultural osmosis.

Through the prophetic function, both churches and other groups exercise critical judgment on one another in the name of the Spiritual Presence. Here the church sounds forth a prophetic word of

judgment upon the society for the sake of its transformation. Indeed Tillich understands the churches’ “prophetic criticism of society” to be aimed at its ultimate transformation so that the state of society might approach theonomy, that is, the “relatedness of all cultural forms to the ultimate.”<sup>22</sup> I will return shortly to this theme of theonomy. For the time being, though, we must once again acknowledge the mutual exercising of this prophetic function as society also rightly directs criticism toward the churches when they fail to honor the full dignity of humanity and to serve justice. This “reverse prophetism”<sup>23</sup> challenges Christian churches to rethink both their speech and practices according to the principles of love and justice.

Finally, what Tillich speaks of as “political establishment” is the mutually exercised royal function. From the point of view of churches, Tillich asserts that every church has a political function, from the local up through the international level. In this function, church leaders are to engage and influence leaders of other social groups so that the church will continue to be recognized in exercising its rights to perform both priestly and prophetic functions. Of course, as the churches engage in political activity, their exercise of power must reject any coercive methods, recognizing that their real power originates solely in the Spiritual Presence. At the same time, from the viewpoint of society legitimately exercising its own royal function, there is a “justified political impact upon the churches,” ensuring that proper limits are set and upheld so that churches do not seek to establish any theocratic political system that would exercise dominion over all areas of life.<sup>24</sup>

### *Key Ecclesiological Distinctions*

Throughout Tillich’s examination of these functions is the recognition of the paradoxical nature of all churches. Any manifestation of the Spiritual Community is paradoxically present, that is, hidden beneath that which appears. By employing theological and sociological categories, Tillich captures an understanding of Spiritual Community that points to the paradoxical relationship between the Spirit and the church.<sup>25</sup> Because of their confession of Jesus as the Christ, churches do manifest elements of the Spiritual Presence, albeit it fragmentarily and imperfectly. And insofar as they do reflect the Spiritual Community, churches are to be understood as a fundamentally theological category. However, as churches participate in the

processes of life and the ambiguities of existence, they must also be understood according to sociological terms and categories, subject to fallibility and sin. Ecclesial humility is called for; the church can never be equated with the Spiritual Community nor be confused with the Kingdom of God.

Furthermore, because of his expansive understanding of the Spirit, Tillich does not limit or restrict the Spiritual Presence to the churches. While this comprehensive pneumatological view is suggested by the mutually exercised functions relating church and society, Tillich makes this point more explicit and concrete through his recognition of what he calls a distinction between latent and manifest spiritual communities.<sup>26</sup> It is to this distinction that I now turn.

Tillich is quite willing to confess that the Spiritual Presence is not restricted to the churches. The Spirit, as the hidden, dynamic presence of God, may also be at work in guiding latent, often secular, spiritual communities where salvation is evident. In fact, these communities may from time to time reflect more truly and faithfully the Spiritual Community than churches do. While these so-called secular communities may reject Jesus as the Christ as confessed within the manifest communities (churches), they can be regarded as spiritual communities insofar as they are determined by the Spirit.<sup>27</sup> In other words, wherever salvation is occurring, wherever human existence is determined by that which is ultimate, and wherever the desire for a communion of love is expressed, the Spirit is present and at work. This insight tempers ecclesial arrogance and challenges churches to be open and attuned to the impact of the Spiritual Presence upon all kinds of communities and groups.

*A Direction for Public Theology: Searching for a New Theonomy*<sup>28</sup>

I return to my opening assertion that Tillich's ecclesiology offers valuable resources for a public theology and that such ecclesial engagement of the world is shaped by the overarching purpose of contributing to the common good of society and the flourishing of the human spirit. This concern for the flourishing of individuals and communities is certainly not the exclusive concern of churches. Drawing upon Tillich's discussion of the function of relating as well as his understanding of latent and manifest spiritual communities, we discover a common ground. Based upon this common ground

of shared concerns, I propose that Tillich's search for a new theonomy is one possible expression of public theology.

We would do well to recall that for Tillich there is an "essential relation between religion and culture in that 'culture is the form of religion and religion the substance of culture'—which is fully realized in the Spiritual Community."<sup>29</sup> Tillich understands both churches and culture as responses to being grasped by the Spiritual Presence, their ultimate ground and aim. Under the impact of the Spiritual Presence, both church and society are united in their essential nature. Stated in another way, latent spiritual communities, like the manifest communities of the churches, are teleologically related to the Spiritual Community. Therefore, what Tillich calls the "ethics of the Kingdom of God" functions as the measure of ethics both in churches and in society.<sup>30</sup>

Recognizing the dynamism at work in the function of relating that is mutually exercised by churches and other social groups (the prophetic function in particular), we can discover an emerging synergy marked by love, power, and justice. Through the manifestation of the Spiritual Presence within creaturely life, both latent and manifest communities are moving toward the hope of theonomy in which all groups and individuals may participate in the unambiguous harmony of love, power, and justice united in theonomous practices. Understood in religious categories, theonomy would mean conquering demonization (i.e., all destructive and oppressive forces) and revealing profanization (i.e., all empty and meaningless forms of life).

Love, power, and justice, of course, are fundamental concepts in Tillich's ontology that penetrate the mutual relations found among individuals and social groups, as well as between humanity and God. These three are united perfectly in God and are united in the new creation of God in the world.<sup>31</sup>

Love creates participation in the concrete situation as the drive toward the unity of the separated. Love is expressed in the reunification of that which is estranged through acceptance and mutual service.

Power is the possibility of self-affirmation in spite of all that would threaten to negate oneself. It is the possibility of overcoming non-being. In more concrete terms, power is a resistant dynamic that challenges political quietism and the privatization of faith in courageously engaging all those forces that would negate human flourishing.

Justice is the form in which the power of being actualizes itself in these encounters with competing forces. Reflected in concrete situations and structures, justice is concerned with preserving what is to be united in love and so it honors the principles of solidarity and community where love is actualized. Justice also expresses concern for equality in which the law is consistently valid for all people as well as concern for liberty in which the intrinsic claim of every person to be accorded dignity and freedom for political and cultural self-determination is honored.

This perfect unity of reuniting love, the power of resisting non-being, and the form of creative justice is a unity in which all people can participate, albeit in fragmentary ways. Together these three inform the concerns and concrete actions of churches and other social groups in their search for a new theonomy.

### A Response to Tillich's Ecclesial Critics

At this point having considered the common ground and the common efforts of a religious-cultural pursuit of theonomy, I do need to engage Tillich's critics on the specific matter of his ecclesiology as to whether or not churches who confess Jesus as the Christ are sufficiently distinguished from latent spiritual communities. One appreciative and yet critical interpreter, Nels Ferré, commented on Tillich's theology that, "at times Tillich's doctrine of the church seems to evaporate into a general theory of religion as a response to the unconditional."<sup>32</sup> He continues:

When [Tillich] claims that the world can be the conscience of the church as well as the church the conscience of the world, would it not also be better to say that the true church is at times more fully present outside formal organizations than within formal ecclesiastical structures?

Ferré concludes by asking: "Is the church a distinctive enough kind of community with genuine nonconformity to the ways of 'the world' and redemptive transcendence over it?"<sup>33</sup>

While I recognize the distinct possibility of interpreting Tillich's system in such a universalized way that the particular revelation of the Christ offers nothing substantially unique, I argue that Tillich did believe that churches as manifest spiritual communities are sufficiently distinct from latent communities because of the symbol of the Cross of the Christ. The Cross for Tillich functions as the

ultimate critical principle within his theological system. Ecclesiologically, this symbol of the cross plays itself out in terms of the Protestant principle, a dynamic through which the Spirit is always at work in an inherently prophetic role radically negating all forms of idolatry.<sup>34</sup> The Cross is the ultimate criterion—"norming," judging, and guiding manifest spiritual communities as they bear witness to the greater public that lacks this criterion. Tillich writes: "The Spiritual Community in its latency is open to profanization and demonization without an ultimate principle of resistance, whereas the Spiritual Community organized as a church has the principle of resistance in itself and is able to apply it self-critically, as in the movements of propheticism and Reformation."<sup>35</sup>

### Conclusion: A Direction for Public Theology

In conclusion, I argue for the importance of critically engaging Tillich's ecclesiology because of his dynamic understanding of church in which churches need not abandon their distinctive identity nor withdraw from public discourse concerning the common good. What Tillich can offer us is an understanding of being church that honors its distinctive identity and functions in ways that are truly public and world engaging. Such a view stands in contrast to the church as a conglomerate of individualistic forms of personal piety or the church as a sectarian community withdrawn from the world. Yet, at the same time, this engagement with the world should not suggest any support for indulging theocratic impulses.

Furthermore, for the sake of a public theology, Tillich's ecclesiology holds numerous possibilities for cooperation with other communities in this increasingly pluralistic society. United in theonomous practices through the manifestation of the Spiritual Presence within creaturely life, both latent and manifest communities are moving toward the hope of theonomy in which all groups and individuals may participate in the unambiguous harmony of power, justice, and love. This hope is not the possession of the church, but rather the promise of the kingdom of God for the sake of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> For a helpful summation of this term, both its historical development and place within contemporary theological discourse, see Max Stackhouse, "Public Theology," *The Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*,

2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2002), 1131-1133.

<sup>2</sup> See especially David Tracy, "A Social Portrait of the Theologian: The Three Publics of Theology: Society, Academy, Church," in *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroads, 1981), 3-46.

<sup>3</sup> The following characterization of potential pitfalls within Protestant ecclesiology in North America is admittedly a rough generalization. In order to gauge the prevalence and concrete manifestations of these ecclesial distortions, detailed sociological research and empirical data would be necessary. Within the context of this paper, however, the identification and description of these reductionisms and extremes have been informed by Tillich's own cultural analysis and theological framework. Furthermore, I do not believe this characterization to be an inaccurate reading of the contemporary religious climate in North America. Numerous examples and evidence could be offered, but providing such substantiation would be moving beyond the scope of this present study.

<sup>4</sup> David H. Kelsey, *The Fabric of Paul Tillich's Theology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 48.

<sup>6</sup> Kelsey, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Maurice B. Schepers, "Paul Tillich on the Church," in *Paul Tillich in Catholic Thought*, eds. Thomas A. O'Meara and Donald Weisser (Dubuque, Iowa: The Priory Press, 1964) 248.

<sup>8</sup> In addition to the volume listed above, see also Raymond F. Bulman and Frederick J. Parrella, eds., *Paul Tillich: A New Catholic Assessment* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1994) and Ronald Modras, *Paul Tillich's Theology of the Church: A Catholic Appraisal* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1976).

<sup>9</sup> Notable among Tillich's critics in North America are Hans Frei, George Lindbeck, and Stanley Hauerwas. These three are cited by Mark Taylor in his edited volume of Tillich's writings. See Mark Kline Taylor, *Paul Tillich: Theologian of the Boundaries* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 18.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 174.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 180. With these words Tillich concludes his second volume, which is fundamentally a presentation of his Christology, and points his readers to the subsequent third volume where the doctrines of the Spirit and of the Kingdom ("integral parts of the christological work") will be explicated.

<sup>12</sup> Tillich, Vol. 3, 172-182. Recognizing the church's fundamental identity as a pneumatological creation guards against the ecclesiological reductionisms outlined above.

<sup>13</sup> Maurice B. Schepers, 242.

<sup>14</sup> Tillich, Vol. 3, 182.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* See section, "The Functions of the Churches, Their Ambiguities, and the Spiritual Community," 182-216.

<sup>16</sup> This expanding function corresponds to universality (catholicity) as a predicate (mark) of the church, particularly in its extensive form. Tillich's presentation of this mark along with the marks of unity and holiness is found in Volume 3, 167-172. It should be noted that Tillich does not include apostolicity as one of the four traditional marks of the church. It could be argued, however, that apostolicity is incorporated into Tillich's presentation of universality in its two forms: intensive and extensive. Intensive universality is viewed qualitatively; there is no life experience or element of creation that can be excluded from the Spiritual Community. This view of universality reveals Tillich's concern for culture and, in particular, the aesthetic elements of life. Extensive universality has a quantitative understanding. Since the appearance of Jesus as the Christ, there is a desire to extend this community to include all peoples, nations, and races. Whether or not this form sufficiently expresses the mark of apostolicity is open for debate.

<sup>17</sup> Tillich, Vol. 3, 196.

<sup>18</sup> The function of relating is particularly significant in guarding against the ecclesiological extremes that were identified above.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 216. Theonomous culture, according to Tillich, is "Spirit-determined and Spirit-directed culture," in which Spirit fulfills the various manifestations of spirit rather than destroying it. For a more extensive discussion on theonomous culture, see the section, "Humanism and the Idea of Theonomy," 249-265.

<sup>20</sup> Schepers, 246.

<sup>21</sup> Tillich, Vol. 3, 212-13.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 162ff.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* This discussion is developed in greater detail in Tillich's section on "The Spiritual Community in its latent and in its manifest stages," 152ff.

<sup>27</sup> Tillich warns his readers that these categories of latent and manifest are often wrongly equated with the classic distinction between the invisible and visible church. In Tillich's understanding, the Spiritual

Community is always identified with the invisible, that is, the hidden, dynamic presence guiding communities. However, this Spiritual Presence is always made visible in some way wherever the experience of revelation and salvation is to be found.

<sup>28</sup> Mark Taylor describes in greater historical and theological detail what he calls Tillich's "struggles for a new theonomy" in the introduction to his edited volume of Tillich's writings. See Mark Kline Taylor, *Paul Tillich: Theologian of the Boundaries*, 15-18.

<sup>29</sup> Tillich, Vol. 3, 158. This statement is reflective of the cultural osmosis that is reflective of the priestly function reflects a kind of cultural osmosis

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>31</sup> Paul Tillich, *Love, Power and Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), 115. While these three concepts permeate Tillich's entire theological system, this particular work offers a remarkably succinct and lucid analysis of these fundamental concepts and how they function within his ontology.

<sup>32</sup> Nels Ferré, "Tillich's View of the Church," in *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, ed. Charles W. Kegley (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1982) 294

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

<sup>34</sup> Tillich makes this explicit connection between the Protestant principle and the Cross of the Christ in Vol. 3, 176.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

**PAUL TILlich AND  
THE ONTOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF  
FREEDOM AND DESTINY**

TODD S. MEI

The formidable question we are giving thought to today is the meaning of freedom, and not only that but in conjunction with it, the meaning of destiny, a word that is unquestionably problematic for the modern age and its concern for autonomy and free will. In a certain sense, the question of freedom is, as Heidegger once described, "the primordial impulse of philosophy in general, its hidden ground" (Heidegger 1985, 57). This is because, at least since the Enlightenment, philosophy has conceived of its project as moving towards a self-understanding that implies an understanding of the ground of human action and the purpose for which this action is undertaken; and this includes thinking itself as an action which perhaps comes to its fullest dominance in Hegel. And yet, the simple paradox is that while freedom is the most primordial question for modern philosophy, it is the most confusing and unanswerable one. The modern debate concerning liberalism is but one example in which the primarily philosophical question of freedom takes shape politically.

In view of the immensity of the territory directly relating to the question of freedom, I ask for your patience in my attempt to think freedom and destiny according to what I view as Tillich's original project of showing their ontological ground. In this sense, the antinomies that plague our understanding of freedom persist because we do not perceive the

ontological ground and therefore the implications of this ground. Thus, in view of this ontological consideration shall open up more broadly to a theological reflection, I have chosen to take a central antinomy that is generally described as "freedom versus determinism."

I intend to keep my argument focused on a crucial distinction to which Tillich draws our attention in an almost too casual way. As you may recall, in the section of *Systematic Theology*, Volume I, entitled "Freedom and Destiny," Tillich makes the following remark:

Man is man because he has freedom, but he has freedom only in polar interdependence to destiny.... Ordinarily one speaks of freedom and necessity. However necessity is a category and not an element. (Tillich 1951, 182)

This paper should be considered as a meditation on and interpretation of this passage. I propose a twofold approach to our subject. First, I intend to explore the meaning of freedom through its relation to necessity as a category of existence; and second, I believe these remarks on freedom will then illuminate a manner in which we can understand destiny in the modern age.

**Freedom and Necessity**

Tillich remarks that necessity is often erroneously seen to be the opposite of freedom, and he characterizes necessity as a "category" and not an "element" of existence. He indeed makes a very terse observation and then proceeds to a discussion on determinism that is not unrelated to the meaning of necessity.

For something to be “necessary,” it means that it is required by something in order to do something. In this sense, we often speak of the necessities to live: food, clothing, shelter, and so on. Certain things are necessary so that we as humans can live. At the most basic level, then, one can say that human freedom is in some way qualified because there are certain things to which we are beholden in order to survive. Necessity is in this way often interpreted deterministically, that is to say, because we in fact need certain things, we are determined by this relationship to them. There are many types of determinism—ranging from social and environmental to genetic and historical—but regardless of the instance, determinism is a tenable argument only insofar as the agent that does the determining is in some way a necessary one, that is, we need it in order to survive. Man as a social being, for example, needs society and is therefore determined by the context of social values into which he emerges. But, as Tillich points out, such a discussion on determinism as a causal process is only relevant to ‘things’ (Tillich 1951, 183) and not to human beings. This is because human beings are the thinking beings; we stand outside any determinative process by virtue of our power of being in thinking. To recognize something to be determinative of our understanding, in other words, is already to in some manner stand outside it. Indeed, this is the essence of Heidegger’s understanding of the ecstatic unity of Dasein’s temporal being. Ultimately, the thesis of determinism is untenable because to be determined by something means that one cannot stand apart from the determining agent. To be determined is to say that the dilemma of one’s determination cannot arise as a dilemma at all because one is at once and always homogenous to this determination.

Ontologically speaking, necessity and determinism cannot be polar opposites of freedom because the phenomenon of freedom supercedes them. This is why Tillich states rather tersely that necessity is not an element of being but a category of it. For necessity to be an element of being would mean that it is intrinsic to being to the point where the structure of being does not transcend necessity. Indeed, to recall a well-known phrase of Tillich’s, one can say that in being we transcend but do not destroy necessity. We must bear in mind that Tillich is speaking of being in terms of the manner of man’s being which is always unfolding according to its manner of becoming. Thus, for necessity to

constitute the structure of being—that is, necessity as an element of being—would mean that our manner of becoming is only directed to fulfilling what is required of existence in order to survive. For Tillich, and indeed for any theological anthropology, this cannot be the case.

Tillich observes that if existence is separate from an original unity, it means that necessity does not hold dominion over being, but rather it indicates the exigency, or ultimate concern, to move back to unity. Thus, as Tillich writes, man is ‘that being in whom all levels of being are united’ (Macleod 1973, 54).<sup>1</sup> By virtue of man’s ability to fulfill and transcend necessity, necessity is therefore a *category* of existence—one among many in which we participate in order to become more ourselves. Necessity is no final determination but merely constitutes the situation that is to be “transcended but not destroyed,” even if this situation is one that is always present, as in regard to the biological and social domains.

We should also observe, nevertheless, how the argument of determinism is more elaborately stated. One can say, for example, that a philosophical or theological system that determines a teleological meaning, a final cause to which we are all drawn, suggests that man is in need of a systematic understanding in order to live authentically and meaningfully. This is because ultimately we are all determined by and according to this final cause. Various theological interpretations fall prey to this sense of determinism in speaking of the will of God as fate and predestination. The argument in favor of determinism says that humans, as the thinking beings, are in need of comporting themselves towards a meaningful end. Yet, where such a teleologically-centered understanding does not account for individual freedom, the teleology becomes a teleology inadequately conceived. The theology of Luther and Calvin have been seen by such scholars as Erich Fromm and Louis Dupré as being situated in an irreconcilable determinism where one is incapable of altering existence in order to receive grace. Tillich, therefore, proposes to understand teleology in terms of a sense of concern. We are grasped, as Tillich observes, by ultimate concern. All movement and effort, physical and reflective, attempt to affront our finitude by resting in an ultimate concern. Or as Tillich writes,

The unconditional concern is total: no part of ourselves or of our world is excluded from it....

The total concern is infinite: no moment of

relaxation and rest is possible in the face of a religious concern which is ultimate, unconditional, total, and infinite (Tillich 1951, 12).

To speak strictly of the necessity of ultimate concern, however, is for Tillich to express a self-contradiction. This is because while we are grasped by an ultimate concern, we are at the same time free to ignore it. The ultimate concern still remains, but we can choose to cast our gaze elsewhere. Ultimate concern determines not a necessity of being but precisely the freedom inhering in being that allows us to receive the givenness of being in order to contemplate it. Tillich's famous analysis of anxiety is but one way in which human freedom is realized. Or as Adrian Thatcher notes, "[Man] experiences the anxiety of losing himself both by actualizing or not actualizing his potentialities. He universally chooses the first way. By this act the transition to existence occurs" (Thatcher 1978, 126).

Thus, Tillich's notion of ultimate concern stands in relation to "finite freedom" which refers to the paradox that although man has freedom, this freedom is limited productively by the horizon of finitude that brings over to man the exigency to affirm being in spite of that which would deny it, that is, nonbeing. Finite freedom is not a limitation in a pejorative sense but constitutes the very vitality and power of being. "The pattern of the courageous man," writes Tillich, is the one who "knows the anxiety of nonbeing because he knows the value of being" (Tillich 1980, 83).

Tillich's notion of finite freedom helps to contextualize the modern tendency to see freedom as a self-sufficient ground. Absolute free will is untenable because the self-sufficient freedom of will is never completely autonomous of ontological determination; it always chooses to act in favor of an interpretation of the meaning of being. Thus, the freedom of will always succumbs to a choice that ultimately directs it in a specific manner that is intended towards a meaning which is greater than it. The paradox is that freedom is never finally free for itself but is affirmed by the meaning for which it is free. In view of this, Tillich notes that finite freedom cannot be negated if it is free for absolute freedom, or resting in God. It is in this sense that we can speak of Plato's maxim that "like can only be known by like." Tillich refers to the importance of seeing freedom in terms of a process and calling whose horizon designates a definite limit; but by virtue of being a horizon, it also indicates what is possible

beyond it. This brings us to the question of freedom in relation to destiny, that is, destiny conceived ontologically.

### **Freedom and Destiny**

If our discussion of freedom is adequate, then the responsibility towards being, which man experiences in his thinking and deliberation, can never simply be for freedom itself. That is to say, freedom is not a sufficient end or *telos*, as it is often conceived in the modern notion of rights and "being free to do what one wants." Ontologically, Tillich expresses that which draws man ahead in his being free as *destiny*, that is, a personal calling that speaks to each one of us in a unique way.

Destiny should not be conceived as a terminal end, or predestination, but as the horizon of utmost ontological possibility that we relate to personally. Indeed, it is by virtue of this horizon that the personal is apprehended; everything relates to the finiteness of this one body that is open to the world. We can therefore speak of destiny as having a double meaning: as that which draws us ahead, and in drawing us ahead, that which is completely open but therefore positive since what is open is what naturally brings us into greater participation. Thus, we can attempt to describe the interpolarity of freedom and destiny ontologically: freedom is the possibility of moving towards one's utmost potential that comes to be known as destiny; destiny, on the other hand, is that which makes freedom a positive freedom, that is, a freedom "freed" from nihilism, thereby giving to every being a sense of meaningfulness.

It is precisely here where Tillich's correlation method comes into view as a fruitful manner of entering into reflection. The theological response to the interpolarity of freedom and destiny sheds immense light on how it is one can understand the eschatological nature of becoming. God, as the alpha and omega, can in no way be a negation or denial of freedom. Rather, God is both the *telos* of human being free as well as the essence of this freedom. God is both being and becoming. Tillich writes, "If we say that God is being-itself, this includes both rest and becoming, both the static and the dynamic elements" (Tillich 1951, 247). God, characterized in this ontological manner, is the essence of the personal calling in destiny, and is at the same time, much greater than it. Thus, Tillich cautions us here not to apply the ontological constraints of being to God himself but to see the dual participation as a



divine mystery: “[God’s] going-out from himself does not diminish or destroy his divinity. It is united with the eternal ‘resting in himself’” (Tillich 1951, 247). Hence, we can see freedom and destiny as an inter-polarity, or to borrow Schelling’s phrase as a “higher opposition.” The tension of this inter-polarity is constituted by “being-free” and “being-towards”; it creates a mysterious relationship where we apprehend what is possible ontologically, which in turn draws us into a greater possibility of comprehending and becoming this possibility.<sup>2</sup> This is what William Cavanaugh refers to as “a theology of participation” (Cavanaugh 1999, 186). It is a theology granting the utmost significance to the meaning of being that lives according to a *telos*, which thereby intensifies the immediate temporal experience of being-in-the-present (Griesch 1996, 20).

The eschatological expression of the inter-polarity of freedom and destiny discloses the essentially personal and inter-personal nature of being and communication in God. Tillich writes, “‘Personal God’ does not mean God is a person. It means that God is the ground of everything personal and that he carries within himself the ontological power of personality” (Tillich 1951, 247). And he adds later,

God is the principle of participation as well as the principle of individualization. The divine life participates in every life as its ground and aim. God participates in everything that is; he has community with it; he shares in its destiny (Tillich 1951, 247).

I would like to close by saying that there is a primal ontological unity between our power of being in thinking and our becoming towards a fuller realization of freedom in destiny. If life is intrinsically strife between freedom and necessity, that is, not in terms of being free from necessity but in actualizing necessity according to free ends, then thinking, or the task of thinking, is the very engagement and enactment of this surmounting of necessity towards free ends. That is to say in short, thinking in its most dedicated sense is being free (Heidegger 1985, 58). In this there is a correlation between the freedom that provides for thinking, what is traditionally referred to as leisure, and the freedom

that arises further from this thinking. As Heidegger remarks, “Philosophy arises, *when* it arises, from a fundamental law of Being itself” (Heidegger 1985, 58). Thus the freedom to think is not a guarantee that thinking will in and of itself attain a freedom for all; rather it attests to the exigency that thinking itself is the only manner in which freedom can be fulfilled since thinking is the manner of moving towards rest in one’s destiny. As such, it constitutes, as the Greeks understood it to be, the highest doing, that is, *bios theoretikos*.

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<sup>1</sup> Macleod refers to *Systematic Theology* but does not give a page reference.

<sup>2</sup> It is within this tension that spontaneity arises (Tillich 1951, 185).

**PLEASE REMEMBER  
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