



# BULLETIN

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#### **ON THE CALENDAR**

The 2007 Tillich Lecture at Harvard University was delivered on May 9. It was given by the preeminent Catholic philosopher of religion, Louis Dupré, Professor Emeritus in Religious Studies, T. Lawrason Riggs Professor of the Philosophy of Religion in the Department of Religious Studies, Yale University. The title of his lecture was "The Fateful Separation of Philosophy and Theology: A Tillichian Reflection." Prof. Dupré's lecture will be published in the *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*.

#### **AWARD FOR JANE OWEN**

Jane Blaffer Owen, preservationist, arts patron, and philanthropist, was honored March 13, 2007 with the SACHEM Award during a ceremony in the Indiana state house rotunda. Gov. Mitch Daniels presented the award to Mrs. Owen for her lifetime of work preserving and promoting the historical and educational attributes of New Harmony, Indiana through the Robert Lee Blaffer Foundation she created in 1958.

The New Harmony resident, now 91, was a 1977 recipient of the Indiana Governor's Arts Award. Her contributions of time and financial support to the

arts and arts organizations, both individually and through the Foundation, have had a profound effect in southwest Indiana and beyond. The Foundation has funded numerous works of art and architecture in New Harmony that have attracted artists and scholars from around the world. To this day, Mrs. Owen remains a tireless supporter of New Harmony and continues to fund community projects to further the artistic and spiritual environment in southwest Indiana.

The Sachem Award is given to one person annually in recognition of a lifetime of excellence and virtue that has brought credit and honor to Indiana. Previous recipients include basketball coaching legend John Wooden and the Reverend Theodore M. Hesburgh, former President of Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana.

“Jane Owen is a gift beyond description,” Governor Daniels said. “She has lived a truly unique life of virtue and goodness that has blessed Indiana in so many ways.”

#### NEW PUBLICATIONS

Andrew J. Carlson, “The Concept of the Demonic in the Theology of Paul Tillich.” Masters of Theology Thesis, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, Spring 2007.

*Please send notice of any new publications on Tillich or by members of the Society to the editor. Thank you.*

#### THE NEW ELECTRONIC BULLETIN

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#### BREAKTHROUGH OF THE UNCONDITIONAL: TILlich’S CONCEPT OF REVELATION AS AN ANSWER TO THE CRISIS OF HISTORICISM

CHRISTIAN DANZ

“The historical sense, if it is untamed at work and draws all conclusions, uproots the future because it destroys the illusion and takes the atmosphere of life of existing things. The historical justice, even if it is really and by pure mind, is a terrible vir-

tue because it always undermines and causes life to fall: its judging always is destruction.”<sup>1</sup> These words come from Friedrich Nietzsche. In his second old-fashioned reflection from 1874 with the title “From Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life,” he describes the consequences of the historicism for life. History has become science and is an illness destroying life. But the wealth of facts produced by the historical specialized science cannot be brought in a connection together and that way they paralyse all actions.

In 1900, historicism has become the central subject in discussions of all cultural sciences, also in theological debates since the thirties of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> In his *Dogmatics*, lectures he gave in Marburg in 1925 but also in other writings of the 1920s, Paul Tillich worked out his theology on the foundation of a theology of revelation. In elevating the concept of revelation to the status of a fundamental concept, Tillich was like other theologians of his generation such as Karl Barth and Friedrich Gogarten. In the Marburg lectures, one finds those reflections on the theory of consciousness, on philosophy of religion and on the theory of meaning that Tillich elaborated after the First World War. In his lectures, these reflections are woven together into a theological philosophy of history that Tillich works out as Christology following Ernst Troeltsch.<sup>3</sup> In the centre of this philosophy of history is the revelation that is understood as breakthrough of the unconditional. With it Tillich describes the constitution of consciousness of history.

This thesis I want to explain in three steps. The first part will briefly reconstruct a diagnosis and therapy of the modern historicism of Ernst Troeltsch. The second part will deal with the question of the reception of Troeltsch’s philosophy of history by Tillich, and the third part will discuss Tillich’s philosophy of history and his concept of revelation as overcoming of historicism.

#### Ernst Troeltsch and the Crisis of Historicism

In 1922, Troeltsch published a small article “The Crisis of Historicism” in the journal *Neue Rundschau*.<sup>4</sup> This text is remarkable for its precise definition of historicism as the signature of modern consciousness. Troeltsch understands historicism as the modern way of thinking and “historicization of our whole knowledge and perception of the mental world.”<sup>5</sup> Historicism is not only a matter of a special history but of an all-European phenomenon shaking

the normative bases of the modern culture and society. In his article Troeltsch names three reasons for historicism as a general, social crisis of orientation.

The first reason deals with the question of objectivity of historical constructions. "History is selection and transformation of an immense material" jutting out from a "mass of turbulent life."<sup>6</sup> The second point is the "introduction of a sociological element into historical research."<sup>7</sup> Finally, the third reason: under conditions of the modern historicism, there is no possibility anymore for a foundation of ethic norms.<sup>8</sup> The crisis of historicism threatens the system of ethical norms. This point shows that Troeltsch shares his diagnosis of criticism of the special history with Nietzsche. But with Nietzsche's solution or therapy for the crisis of historicism Troeltsch does not agree.<sup>9</sup> Historicism could not be mastered by getting out of history but only by a new connection between empirical research of history and a philosophy of history.<sup>10</sup>

This thought about a new connection Troeltsch explains in his unfinished book on historicism from 1922. In his well-known formula, Troeltsch says: "The idea of building is to overcome history by history and to make a platform of new activity. On it the present synthesis of culture as the aim of philosophy of history has to rest."<sup>11</sup> However, with his philosophy of history Troeltsch wants to lighten historicity of the present-time, and carry the founding of ethical norms out of history.<sup>12</sup> The "last aim of all history" means an "understanding of the present-time" as well as making a "present synthesis of culture."<sup>13</sup> We know that Troeltsch sees the synthesis of culture in the "Europäismus."<sup>14</sup> But nevertheless, there are some fundamental problems in carrying norms from history.<sup>15</sup> First, there is the relation of historical development and its structure that is only possible out of the own present-time. And second, there is the question of the position of philosophy of history. Do insight and knowledge about historical nature of all ethic norms and values lie in philosophy of history? Or does knowledge exist in happenings of life and world themselves? Behind these problems, there is the relation of philosophy of history and religion, but for Troeltsch the place of knowing about historical reality is in philosophy of history and not in religion.<sup>16</sup>

### **Tillich's Connection with Troeltsch's Philosophy of History**

Paul Tillich agrees with Ernst Troeltsch in his diagnosis of the modern historicism. History is not the place of absolute norms. Of course, this intensifies the problem of explanation for theology, especially for the concept of faith. In Tillich's writings before the First World War, he already shows his knowledge of this problem, and he works out a solution basing on philosophy of history like Troeltsch.<sup>17</sup> Whereas Troeltsch assigns the task of founding ethical norms and the place of our knowledge of history into philosophy of history, Tillich locates this task in theology itself. This has to give reasons for the absoluteness of Christianity.<sup>18</sup>

It can be seen, then, that Tillich shares not only Troeltsch's opinion to dam up critically historicism by the construction of a philosophy of history but also the directing a philosophy of history at the present-time. With his concept of the "Standpunkt" point of view, existing in all his writings since the beginning of the twenties of the last century, Tillich follows Troeltsch's formulation of the problem of philosophy of history.<sup>19</sup> Philosophy of history aims at lightening of historical and normative nature of the present point of view.

Seen in this context, the task of philosophy of history has to be a construction of the historical position. Concerning this, Tillich does the same as Troeltsch. In the construction and interpretation of history and its development, Tillich follows Troeltsch's criticism of Schelling and Hegel and their construction of the material, real development of history to the present-time. As a result of historical criticism, Tillich says that philosophy of history does not construct the real, material development of history but exists only itself as a philosophy of history. Therefore—and this is different from what happens in Troeltsch—the task of a philosophy of history is to make itself the principle of construction.<sup>20</sup>

Tillich's basis of a philosophy of history is a philosophy of the human spirit. In his theology after the First World War, Tillich begins with a philosophy of spirit as a basic matter for history and proceeds to understand history as the contingent transparency of the human spirit in its inward reflexivity.<sup>21</sup> In his *Dogmatics* lectures, he articulates that he has provided an original answer to the crisis of historicism. This answer consists in the fact that Tillich understands faith as the contingent event of becoming reflexive or becoming self-aware in which self-relatedness of the spirit understands its own historicity, or its own historical nature.

More important is another aspect—the relation of philosophy of history and religion. Tillich shifts the insight in historicity of ethical norms into religion itself. Here we find a difference with Troeltsch who put it in philosophy of history. By breaking through the present position, the point of view, as position of constructing history in its own reflexive structure and at the same time historical determination, Tillich wants to connect these two aspects of a methodology of history and the construction of history of religion. Out of this results Tillich's criticism of Troeltsch's treatment of the crisis of historicism in his concept of a present synthesis of culture of a "Europäismus."<sup>22</sup>

How Tillich describes the structure of consciousness of history with his theological interpretation of history and his concept of revelation in his lectures delivered in 1925 in Marburg and later in Dresden will be our next step.

### Revelation as Breakthrough of the Unconditional

Tillich's *Dogmatics* is the basis of his later *Systematic Theology* and contains an interpretation of his theology of revelation. It is a question of historical revelation. In his concept of revelation, Tillich describes his understanding of a constitution of consciousness of history, in contrast to the philosophy of history of Troeltsch.<sup>23</sup> I want to explain Tillich's concept of revelation and his historical, philosophical answer to the crisis of historicism in three steps. I begin with the concept of revelation, then I work out its connection with the concept of history, and finally I sketch the overcoming of historicism with the concept of revelation.

First, in his *Dogmatics* Tillich describes the concept of revelation with the metaphor of *Durchbruch*, breakthrough. He calls this event in which the consciousness of history is constituted the breakthrough of the unconditional into the conditioned. In paragraph five we read: "Revelation is *Durchbruch*, breakthrough, of the unconditioned into the conditioned. It is neither *Verwirklichung*, realization, nor *Zerstörung*, destruction, of the conditioned forms but their *Erschütterung*, tremor, jolt, shaking, and their *Umwendung*, turning around."<sup>24</sup> An important aspect is that revelation is its differentiation from idealism and supranaturalism, both of which are one-sided and secondary abstractions of revelation. Revelation is a phenomenon that means we cannot speak about something directly but only indirectly. This indirect speech about revelation of the unconditional is sym-

bolic speech and expresses "not the matter itself."<sup>25</sup> In the event of revelation, consciousness becomes a medium of the unconditional. The unconditional is able to show itself only in the conditioned, and, in fact, only as a reflex of this self-relatedness of spirit in relation to conditioned forms. For the spirit, these conditioned forms enter consciousness as the historically changeable expression of spirit's own self-relatedness.<sup>26</sup> In the 1920s, Tillich describes this event of becoming reflexive as revelation. The concept of revelation aims at an understanding of consciousness in its reflexive structure. In this understanding consciousness constitutes itself as knowing about history. However, with his concept of revelation Tillich explains the constitution of a consciousness of history. With it, he makes the connection to history that will be our next point.

The connection with history arises from the term of *Dämonisches*, the demonic, from fighting between demonic and perfect revelation. There are some differences between demonic consciousness and perfect revelation: In contrast to demonic consciousness, which is historically unconscious and fixes revelation on certain objects,<sup>27</sup> in perfect revelation something concrete becomes the medium for representing the unconditional by being negated. The concrete and special is the suitable form of representation of self-relatedness of the spirit. While becoming transparent of the consciousness in religion in its inward reflexivity of its self-relatedness, consciousness takes its legal content determinations as historically changeable expressions of dimension of the absolute. These are the self-relatedness of the spirit. And here knowing about history comes off.

The task of philosophy of history is the construction of the way to itself. Therefore, it relates only to itself. The inward structure of history results from various types of stages of the self-understanding of consciousness.<sup>28</sup> These types are Paganism, Graecism, and Judaism that do not represent historical epochs but stages of self-awareness of consciousness in its way to its self-transparency. This self-transparency lies in perfect revelation and is the aim of history of religion concentrating on the own present-time. In Tillich's Christology, he presents the subject of self-awareness of the human spirit as place of construction and interpretation of history.<sup>29</sup> The history of religion not only aims at perfect revelation but at the same time at the dissolution of religion as an own sphere of culture. Therefore, religion is for Tillich, and this idea is similar to

Barth, not its own sphere of culture but reflexivity and transparency of the process of culture in culture.

And now we have to deal with the question of Tillich's concept of revelation and his answer to the crisis of historicism. Given his way of interpreting the concept of revelation, the alternative between supranaturalism and rationalism is overcome, and a basis for philosophy of history in the absolute nature of Christianity is provided. To describe the essence of Christianity is the task of dogmatics. Dogmatics is not reflection about faith but an expression of the transparency of consciousness. This is why we cannot look for the essence of Christianity in historical dimensions but only in perfect revelation. Here history becomes evident as interpretation of certainty.

Seen in this context are two aspects. To begin with, the knowledge about historicity of all ethical norms, in history there is no unconditioned truth. Tillich dissolves all eternal norms. And the other, Tillich's philosophy of history aims at normativity, of the historical point of view understanding itself in its historicity and becoming transparent as a place of normativity. It follows that for Tillich history is the process of consciousness' becoming conscious about its own historicity. That is to say: this self-transparency contains the theonomy that is the meaning and aim of history.<sup>30</sup> But knowing about historicity does not remove the need for ethical norms; rather history is the place of ethical self-interpretation of human being in its life.

Now finally we can say that Tillich's answer to the crisis of historicism lies in his concept of revelation because he understands revelation as the contingent event in which we become aware of historicity or of the nature of history itself. In this way Tillich incorporates into his concept of revelation a connection between the constitution of history and the historical and concrete character of our knowledge of history. The kernel of his answer is in the idea that faith is a becoming aware of the consciousness of history in itself. In Tillich's concept of revelation, Troeltsch's philosophy of history is continued insofar as it is theologically self-related. A philosophy of history is related to itself and constructs its own possibility in the description of the development of knowing about history.

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<sup>1</sup> F. Nietzsche, *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben. Der unzeitgemäßen Betrachtungen zweites Stück*, Leipzig, p. 53. I express my thanks to my wife, Uta-Marina Danz, for translating this paper.

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<sup>2</sup> See F.W. Graf, *Geschichte durch Übergeschichte überwinden. Antihistorisches Geschichtsdenken in der protestantischen Theologie der 1920er Jahre*, in: W. Küttler/J. Rüsen/E. Schulz (Ed.), *Geschichtsdiskurs 4: Krisenbewußtsein, Katastrophenerfahrungen und Innovationen 1880-1945*, Frankfurt/Main 1997, pp. 217-244, here p. 229.

<sup>3</sup> See F. Wittekind, *Die Vernunft des Christenglaubens. Zu den philosophischen Hintergründen der Christologie der Marburger Dogmatik*, in: *Wie viel Vernunft braucht der Glaube? International Yearbook for Tillich Research* Vol. 1, ed. by C. Danz/W. Schüßler/E. Sturm, Wien 2005, pp. 133-157.

<sup>4</sup> E. Troeltsch, *Die Krisis des Historismus*, in: *Schriften zur Politik und Kulturphilosophie (1918-1923)* (= KGA Vol. 18), ed. by G. Hübinger, Berlin/New York 2002, pp. 437-455. To the development of philosophy of history of Troeltsch see H.-G. Drescher, *Das Problem der Geschichte bei Ernst Troeltsch*, in: *ZThK* 57 (1960), pp. 186-230; F.W. Graf/ H. Ruddies, *E. Troeltsch: Geschichtsphilosophie in praktischer Absicht*, in: J. Speck (Ed.), *Grundprobleme der großen Philosophen. Philosophie der Neuzeit IV*, Göttingen, pp. 128-164.

<sup>5</sup> E. Troeltsch, *Die Krisis des Historismus*, p. 438. 437.

<sup>6</sup> E. Troeltsch, *Die Krisis des Historismus*, p. 441.

<sup>7</sup> E. Troeltsch, *Die Krisis des Historismus*, p. 445.

<sup>8</sup> E. Troeltsch, *Die Krisis des Historismus*, p. 448.

<sup>9</sup> F. Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, in: *Sämtliche Werke. KGA Vol. 1*, München 1988, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> See E. Troeltsch, *Die Krisis des Historismus*, p. 454.

<sup>11</sup> E. Troeltsch, *Der Historismus und seine Probleme. Erstes (einziges) Buch: Das logische Problem der Geschichtsphilosophie* (= *Gesammelte Schriften* Vol. 3), Aalen 1977 (= ND der Ausgabe Tübingen 1922), p. 772.

<sup>12</sup> See C. Danz, *Gott und die menschliche Freiheit. Studien zum Gottesbegriff in der Neuzeit*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2005, pp. 69-87.

<sup>13</sup> E. Troeltsch, *Schriften zur Bedeutung des Protestantismus für die moderne Welt (1906-1913)* (= KGA Vol. 8), ed. by T. Rendtorff, Berlin/New York 2002, p. 205; *Meine Bücher*, in: *Aufsätze zur Geistesgeschichte und Religionssoziologie* (= *Gesammelte Schriften* Vol. 4), Aalen 1981 (2. ND der Ausgabe Tübingen 1925), pp. 11-18, here p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> E. Troeltsch, *Der Historismus und seine Probleme*, p. 772.

<sup>15</sup> See E. Troeltsch, *Der Historismus und seine Probleme*, p. 162. To this fundamental problem, see also O.G. Oexle, *Troeltschs Dilemma*, in: F.W. Graf (Ed.), *Ernst*

Troeltschs Historismus (= Troeltsch-Studien Bd. 11), Göttingen 2000, pp. 23-64, here p. 44-49.

<sup>16</sup> See E. Troeltsch, *Die Absolutheit des Christentums und die Religionsgeschichte* (1902/1912), mit den Thesen von 1901 und den handschriftlichen Zusätzen (= KGA Vol. 5), Berlin/New York 1998. F. Wittekind, *Die geschichtsphilosophische Grundlegung eines ethischen Glaubensverständnisses in Troeltschs Absolutheitsschrift – oder: Das Reich Gottes als Universalgeschichte*, in: R. Bernhardt/G. Pfeleiderer (Ed.), *Christlicher Wahrheitsanspruch – historische Relativität. Auseinandersetzungen mit Ernst Troeltschs Absolutheitsschrift im Kontext heutiger Religionstheologie*, Zürich 2004, pp. 131-168.

<sup>17</sup> See P. Tillich, *Die christliche Gewißheit und der historische Jesus*, in: *Briefwechsel und Streitschriften. Theologische, philosophische und politische Stellungnahmen und Gespräche* (= EGW VI), Frankfurt/Main 1983, EGW VI, S. 31-50. C. Danz, *God and History: The Influence of Schelling's Philosophy of History on Tillich's Early Theology of History*, in: *Bulletin of the NAPTS* 32, 1 (2006), pp. 27-34.

<sup>18</sup> See P. Tillich, *Die christliche Gewißheit und der historische Jesus*, EGW VI, p. 43 (thesis 101).

<sup>19</sup> See P. Tillich, *Über die Idee einer Theologie der Kultur*, in: *Kulturphilosophische Schriften* (= MW 2), Berlin/New York 1990, pp. 69-85, here p. 70; *Die Theologie als Wissenschaft*, in: *Vossische Zeitung*, Nr. 512 (1921), pp. 2. 14.

<sup>20</sup> See P. Tillich, *Das Problem der Geschichte*, in: *Religion, Kultur, Gesellschaft. Unveröffentlichte Texte aus der deutschen Zeit (1908-1933). Erster Teil* (= EGW X), Berlin/New York 1999, pp. 85-100, here p. 98.

<sup>21</sup> See F. Wittekind, *Die Vernunft des Christenglaubens. Zu den philosophischen Hintergründen der Christologie der Marburger Dogmatik*, pp. 134f.

<sup>22</sup> P. Tillich, *Dogmatik-Vorlesung* (Dresden 1925-1927) (= EGW XIV), Berlin/New York 2005, p. 48.

<sup>23</sup> See F. Wittekind, 'Sinndeutung der Geschichte'. Zur Entwicklung und Bedeutung von Tillichs Geschichtsphilosophie, in: C. Danz (Ed.), *Theologie als Religionsphilosophie. Studien zu den problemgeschichtlichen und systematischen Voraussetzungen der Theologie Paul Tillichs*, Wien 2004, pp. 135-172,

<sup>24</sup> P. Tillich, *Dogmatik-Vorlesung*, p. 19.

<sup>25</sup> P. Tillich, *Dogmatik-Vorlesung*, p. 17. See M. Moxter, *Kultur als Lebenswelt. Studien zum Problem einer Kulturtheologie*, Tübingen 2000, pp. 59ff.

<sup>26</sup> On Tillich's concept of revelation see also P. Tillich, *Religionsphilosophie*, in: *Frühe Hauptwerke* (= GW I), Stuttgart 1959, pp. 295-364, here pp. S. 350-356; *Offenbarung: Religionsphilosophisch*, in: *Religionsphiloso-*

*phische Schriften* (= MW Bd. 4), Berlin/New York 1987, pp. 237-242, here p. 238.

<sup>27</sup> See P. Tillich, *Die Idee der Offenbarung*, in: *Theologische Schriften* (= MW Bd. 6), Berlin/New York 1992, pp. 99-106, here p. 106; *Offenbarung*, MW Bd. 4, p. 240.

<sup>28</sup> See P. Tillich, *Dogmatik-Vorlesung*, p. 49.

<sup>29</sup> See C. Danz, *Jesus Christus als Mitte der Geschichte. Die geschichtsphilosophischen Grundlagen von Paul Tillichs Christologie*, in: P. Haigis/G. Hummel/D. Lax (Ed.), *Christus Jesus – „Mitte der Geschichte“!? Beiträge des X. Internationalen Paul-Tillich-Symposiums Frankfurt/Main 2004*, Berlin 2007, pp. 142-154.

<sup>30</sup> See P. Tillich, *Kairos*, in: *Religionsphilosophische Schriften* (= MW Bd. 4), Berlin/New York 1987, pp. 53-72, here p. 67.

### *Coming in the Summer Bulletin...*

- ◆ *More papers*
- ◆ *Updates*
- ◆ *New Publications*
- ◆ *Report of the French Society Meeting*
- ◆ *Dues Notice*

**Please send articles, information on publications, items for the calendar to the editor.  
Thank you.**

**THE ESSENTIAL PLACE OF THE  
KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AND THE  
ACCEPTANCE OF REVELATION IN TILlich'S  
METAPHYSICS OF DIVINE ACTION**

STEPHEN BUTLER MURRAY

It would be an understatement to say that this paper is being delivered under rather unusual circumstances. It is my normal practice, during the time that I am traveling to a conference or speaking engagement, to open my laptop, and to read over and concretize the final draft of my paper. It decidedly is not my normal practice to leave said laptop on the seat next to me as I exit the plane, entrusting that my computer will continue on to have a lovely vacation in Miami. That is to say, my computer and the paper contained therein that I planned to deliver spent some time in Miami overnight, was in Dallas this morning, in Atlanta this afternoon, and even now is winging its way to Washington, D.C. where hopefully it will find me in time for the lecture that I will deliver Monday morning on Abraham Kuyper and Paul Tillich's understandings of theology of culture with respect to politics and art for the Consultation on Dutch Protestant Theologies.

Despite the absence of my paper, thanks to a laptop that I was able to rent this morning, I shall endeavor to offer a version of my paper as originally planned. Please forgive me if it lacks something of the sublime, if the argument is not quite as intricate and tight as I might normally expect of myself, but given that I served as the program chair for this year's meetings of the Tillich Society, I thought that it would be remiss if I absented myself from the proceedings and hid in my hotel room. That said, I spent this morning listening intently to the excellent papers of those who preceded me in the day, and all the while furiously typing up a paper without notes or research in front of me, doing what I could from memory. As many of you know me and my scholarship on Tillich for nearly ten years now, my work tends to be far more careful than is this paper today. I ask that you do not poke too deftly at my rather soft underbelly, given the circumstances.

Apologies aside, let me offer what I may. What I want to advocate in this paper is a reading of Paul Tillich's metaphysics of divine action in which the ontological dimensions of divine action are dependent upon both the knowledge of God and the acceptance of revelation implicit in the human subject who receives the revelation of divine action. That is

to say, I read Tillich as offering an interesting paradox: while God is the ground of being, not a being among other beings, being above and beyond being, indeed, by the end of the third volume of the *Systematic Theology*, God is the Unconditioned, and while Tillich maintains all of that regarding the being of God, his articulation of divine action lends a rather unstable, multi-chromatic understanding of the very metaphysics of God's actions, whereby the very reality of God's activity depends, at least to some degree, on the one who is the recipient of divine activity.

I come to advocate this position as a result of an interaction that occurred last year, when I delivered a paper before this Society on Tillich's understanding of the wrath of God, a paper to which two Tillich scholars of my generation, my friends John Thattamanil and Jonathan Rothchild, offered critiques that I found rather Barthian for two such careful readers of Tillich. In that paper, I argued that for Tillich, the experience of despair is reflected in the symbol of the "wrath of God."<sup>1</sup> Arguing against those theologians, especially Albrecht Ritschl, who would reinterpret or abandon divine wrath due to a seeming split between God's love and God's wrath, Tillich develops the idea that this experience of despair justifies the use of the symbol of the "wrath of God" as a way of expressing an element in the relationship between God and human beings. In this sense, I paid careful attention, as I entreat you to do as well, to the language that Tillich uses with regard to the relationality, even the emotional state of the human person, upon which his conceptualization of divine wrath depends and relies.

Tillich once preached that when human beings feel as though God is rejecting them, "we cannot love God. He appears to us as an oppressive power, as He who gives laws according to his pleasure, who judges according to His commandments, who condemns according to His wrath."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, for those in despair, who are aware of their own estrangement from God, it appears as though God presents a threat of ultimate destruction, taking on demonic traits.<sup>3</sup> However, the important realization for the person who becomes reconciled to God is that, although one's experience of divine wrath was genuine, it was not the experience of a God different or separate from the God to whom one is reconciled. Rather, the realization of the one who is reconciled is that the wrath of God was the way in which the God of love acted in relation to them. Tillich exhorted that, "we understand that what we have experienced as

oppression and judgment and wrath is in reality the working of love, which tries to destroy within us everything which is against love. To love this love is to love God.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the wrath of God is the “in-escapable and unavoidable reaction against every distortion of the law of life, and above all against human pride and arrogance,” the reestablishment of the proper balance between God and humankind that had been disturbed by the person’s attempted self-elevation against God.<sup>5</sup>

The quality of God’s love is that it stands against all that is against love.<sup>6</sup> In showing the person the self-destructive consequences of one’s rejection of love, the divine love acts according to its own nature, which means that the person may experience this love as a threat to his or her own being. As such, the person perceives God as the God of wrath, although this is only in the temporal sense, not in ultimate terms. It is only by accepting the forgiveness that is offered by God that one finds the visage of God transformed from one of wrath into the ultimately valid face of the God of love. The very quality of love is that it drives toward reunion of that which is separated.<sup>7</sup>

As I said, this paper is a work in progress, and this is a process in which I realize that my reading of Tillich is changing with time as I think more deeply about Tillich’s theology, and more widely upon the larger theological world. I realize that when I first read Tillich, my hermeneutical perspective relied greatly upon the strong metaphysics of Karl Barth, and the ontological disputes among the patristic theologians. More recently, I have found myself fascinated by those theologians who pay more attention to the liminal space of the divine-human encounter, who seek a multidimensionality to that relationship, in which we recognize that God is absolute, but that we similarly recognize that we human beings are limited, finite, even fragile, while seeking eternity, the ultimate, the unconditioned. Even if we accept the proposition that God is unchanged and unchanging, we, ourselves, are without question changing, changeable, even malleable creatures. But beyond that, we are changing, changeable, malleable, utterly conditioned creatures whom Tillich understands as having the capacity to participate in the unconditional, and it is in this relationship, in this participation, that the quality of what God sets forth may be received differently by the one who receives it.

For example, for Tillich, what God offers always is love, and due to the state of separation, the person who receives this divine love may experience it not

as love, but as fiery wrath. When I read that, I am convinced that Tillich is not speaking so much as the multidimensional capacities of God’s love, but upon the multidimensional capacities for human reception of revelation. In support of this reading, I am reminded that when Tillich, early in the first volume of the *Systematic Theology*, distinguishes between ontological reason and technical reason, he describes ontological reason as the “structure of the mind which enables the mind to grasp and to shape reality,” and in this respect ontological reason is related to Logos, the very “word which grasps and shapes reality.” In this sense, relating the divine Logos to ontological reason, and then later in Tillich’s discussions of human capacities to go beyond living within mere environment and instead developing a world in which we live, Tillich endows human beings and human reason with considerable potency.

When I put this together, I am given to a moment of pause, and I find myself asking the question: If our ontological reason is the structure of the mind which enables the mind to grasp and to shape reality, and if human beings are capable of developing a world out of mere environment, is it possible that human beings’ understanding of divine action might actually shape, change, and transform divine action within the bounds of temporality? Certainly, Tillich maintains that in transcending the finite, our ultimate concern of God breaks off the concreteness of a being-to-being relationship with us. And yet, what if God reengages this sort of relationship with us, by acting directly upon the human subject? What if eternity invades the temporal, if the kairic moment of divine action occurs? In entering the temporal, does eternity lose something of its ineffable, unchanging, unchangeable quality as such? Remember, I am not saying that God unto Godself exits or emerges from the eternal to dwell in the temporal, save for the enfleshing that Tillich mentions in the third volume of the *Systematic Theology*, but I am claiming that when the activity of God exits the eternal in its conception and enters the temporal in its enactment, the execution of divine activity occurs within the temporal limits of our reality, a reality that not only is grasped but shaped by our ontological reason. As we shape our world out of the environment around us, does our capacity to shape our world have the potency to shape, change, and transform the temporally-imbued activity of God in a way that is different from its origin in eternity? In this sense, is it possible for the very metaphysics of divine action, not God, but God’s actions in the tem-

poral, is it possible for the very metaphysics of divine action to be effected by the knowledge of God and the acceptance of revelation in the human subject?

My reading of Tillich is that he allows this, that our capacities to shape our world provides the space within which the ontological dimensions of a given divine action may be perceived, reinterpreted, and thereby received in a different manner than in which the divine will had sent the action out of eternity and into the temporal. That said, while I do think that Tillich endows human beings with the capacity to shape the temporal dimensions of divine activity, this is not a simplistic equation, as though the ontological reason of the human subject is somehow able to trump and overwhelm the divine Logos within the limited domain of temporality. The human subject, while a grandly limited creature, merely seeks the transcendent. The divine that penetrates into the temporal is transcendence itself, the yearning of the human subject, but not the domain of the human subject. Thus, it is possible within the temporal for the divine will to act upon the oftentimes stubborn and averse will of the human subject, especially a human subject grappling with non-being and the daemonic, a human subject struggling with separation.

It is in this sense that Tillich expresses the experience of despair in the form of the symbol of "condemnation," which means removal from the eternal, the experience of separation from one's eternity.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, despair can point beyond the limits of temporality, toward the situation whereby one is bound to the divine life without being united to the divine life through love. Yet, Tillich claims that both for time and for eternity, even in the state of separation, God works creatively in human persons, even if that creative work is experienced as destructive wrath.<sup>9</sup>

This realization allows one to have faith in providence, wherein Tillich maintains that, "there is a creative and saving possibility implied in every situation, which cannot be destroyed by any event. Providence means that the daemonic and destructive forces within ourselves and our world can never have an unbreakable grasp upon us, and that the bond which connects us with the fulfilling love can never be disrupted."<sup>10</sup> Indeed, providence and the forgiveness of sins are intrinsically linked together in Tillich's theology.<sup>11</sup> Even in the state of condemnation, the person is never cut off from God as the ground of being. In his articulation of eschatology,

Tillich insists that in the present, which witnesses to the permanent transition of the temporal to the eternal, that which is negative is defeated in its claim to be positive.<sup>12</sup> In the face of the eternal, the appearance of evil as positive vanishes, in which the love of God as "burning fire" incinerates anything that pretends to be positive but is not.<sup>13</sup> Yet, it is important to remember that while love destroys that which is against love, it does not destroy the one who is the bearer of that which is against love, who is a creation of love.<sup>14</sup> The love of God cannot deny itself, and so nothing positive can be burned, either by the fire of judgment, or by the fire of wrath.

While the person is not destroyed by this burning fire of God's love, Tillich maintains that, "the unity of his will is destroyed, he is thrown into a conflict with himself, the name of which is despair, mythologically speaking, hell. Dante was right when he called even Hell a creation of the divine love. The hell of despair is the strange work that love does within us in order to open us up for its own work, justification of him who is unjust. But even despair does not make us into a mechanism. It is a test of our freedom and personal dignity, even in relation to God. The Cross of Christ is the symbol of the divine love, participating in the destruction into which it throws him who acts against love: This is the meaning of atonement."

In closing, it is this quote that strikes me especially, that has remained with me over the years. The love of God may be transformed, received by the person in separation from the ground of being as a fiery wrath. Yet, while this transformed love-as-wrath does indeed burn as fire does, implying that there is some basic real transformation in the realm of the temporal based on the perspective of the human subject, it is important that the ontological *essence* of God's love is not transformed in the reception of love as wrath. Again, "The hell of despair is the strange work that love does within us in order to open us up for its own work, justification of him who is unjust." If in substance or aspect, the outpouring of divine love has been transformed into divine wrath by the perception of the separated person who receives it, it would seem that in essence, divine love remains unchanged, working no matter how it is perceived to justify the one who is unjust, to bridge the separation from the ground of being, to draw the one caught in despair into the dynamic relationality implicit to participation.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. II (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 76-77.

<sup>2</sup> Tillich preached this in the sermon, "To Whom Much is Forgiven..." in Paul Tillich, *The New Being* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 10-11.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, II: 77-78.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Tillich, *The New Being*, 10-11.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations*, 71.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, II: 77-78. The love that Tillich describes is not sentimental, but includes erotic urges, libidinous drives, friendly reciprocity, and altruistic self-giving. See Peter Slater, "The Relevance of Tillich's Concept of Creative Justice in the New Millennium," in Raymond F. Bulman and Frederick J. Parrella, eds. *Religion in the New Millennium: Theology in the Spirit of Paul Tillich* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2001), 45; and the first chapter of Alexander C. Irwin, *Eros Toward the World: Paul Tillich and the Theology of the Erotic* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> Paul Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice: Ontological Analyses and Ethical Applications* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 68-69.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, II:78.

<sup>9</sup> It is important to realize that Tillich does affirm a certain chaotic element in the divine life, claiming that, "Creation and chaos belong to each other, and even the exclusive monotheism of biblical religion confirms this structure of life. It is echoed in the symbolic descriptions of the divine life, of its abysmal depth, of its character as burning fire, of its suffering over and with the creatures, of its destructive wrath. But in the divine life the element of chaos does not endanger its eternal fulfillment, whereas in the life of the creature, under the conditions of estrangement, it leads to the ambiguity of self-creativity and destructiveness. Destructiveness can then be described as the prevalence of the elements of chaos over against the pole of form in the dynamics of life." *Ibid.*, III: 51. However, Tillich tempers this by stating that, "Love does not do more than justice demands, but love is the ultimate principle of justice. Love reunites; justice preserves what is to be united. It is the form in which and through which love performs its work. Justice in its ultimate meaning is creative justice, and creative justice is the form of reuniting love." Paul Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*, p. 71.

<sup>10</sup> Tillich preaches this in "The Meaning of Providence," which can be found in Paul Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), 106-107. Alexander J. McKelway reminds us that this understanding of God's love and judgment is signifi-

cant for Tillich's doctrine of predestination. Alexander J. McKelway, *The Systematic Theology of Paul Tillich* (New York: Delta Books, 1964), 135.

<sup>11</sup> Tillich writes that, "While the tension between love and power refers basically to creation, the tension between love and justice refers basically to salvation. The analysis of transforming justice as an expression of creative love makes it unnecessary for me to reject the ordinary contrast between proportional justice and super-added love. In this sense, there can be no conflict between justice and love in God. But in another sense there could be, in a sense that is very similar to that in which love and power have been contrasted. Love destroys, as it strange work, what is against love. It does so according to the justice without which it would be chaotic surrender of the power of being. Love, at the same time, as its own work, saves through forgiveness that which is against love. It does so according to the justifying paradox without which it would be a legal mechanism." Paul Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*, 113-114.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. III (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), 398-399. Earlier, Tillich makes an important point that judgment includes condemnation and the wrath of God, has eschatological connotations, and thus the question arises whether divine love might have a possible limit. He responds to this question by arguing that, "The threat of ultimate judgment and the symbols of eternal condemnation or eternal death point to such a limit. It is necessary, however, to distinguish between eternal and everlasting. Eternity as a quality of the divine life cannot be attributed to a being that as condemned is separated from the divine life. Where the divine love ends, being ends; condemnation can only mean that the creature is left to the nonbeing it has chosen. The symbol "eternal death" is even more expressive, where interpreted as self-exclusion from eternal life and consequently from being. If, however, one speaks of everlasting or endless condemnation, one affirms a temporal duration that is not temporal. Such a concept is contradictory by nature. An individual with concrete self-consciousness is temporal by nature. Self-consciousness as the possibility of experiencing either happiness or suffering includes temporality. In the unity of the divine life, temporality is united with eternity. If temporality is completely separated from eternity, it is mere nonbeing and is unable to give the form for experience, even the experience of suffering and despair... It is true that finite freedom cannot be forced into unity with God because it is a unity of love. A finite being can be separated from God; it can indefinitely resist reunion; it can be thrown into self-destruction and utter despair; but

even this is the work of the divine love, as the inscription which Dante saw written over the entrance of hell so well shows (Canto III). Hell has being only in so far as it stands in the unity of the divine love. It is not the limit of the divine love. The only preliminary limit is the resistance of the finite creature... The final expression of the unity of love and justice in God is the symbol of justification. It points to the unconditional validity of the structures of justice but at the same time to the divine act in which love conquers the immanent consequences of the violation of justice. The ontological unity of love and justice is manifest in final revelation as the justification of the sinner. The divine love in relation to the unjust creature is grace." *Ibid.*, I: 284-285.

<sup>13</sup> A. T. Mollegen points to the Christological dimension of this theology: "The Crucifixion-Resurrection event is the breaking through into human consciousness and existence of the New Being in Christ. The divine life maintains community with all human life, and through human life with all existence by taking upon itself the fact and the consequences of existential separation (sin and tragedy). The divine love suffers with, but not instead of, those who receive that love. It suffers for, but not instead

of, those who resist it. The divine love, rejected, rejects the rejection and is seen as wrath by the rejector. The wrath of God is therefore the surgical knife of the love of God. The demand of essential being is no longer demand or judgment when it is given as the New Being." A.T. Mollegen, "Christology and Biblical Criticism in Tillich," in Charles W. Kegley, ed. *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, 2<sup>nd</sup>. (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1982), 277.

<sup>14</sup> While the person is not destroyed by this burning fire of God's love, "the unity of his will is destroyed, he is thrown into a conflict with himself, the name of which is despair, mythologically speaking, hell. Dante was right when he called even Hell a creation of the divine love. The hell of despair is the strange work that love does within us in order to open us up for its own work, justification of him who is unjust. But even despair does not make us into a mechanism. It is a test of our freedom and personal dignity, even in relation to God. The Cross of Christ is the symbol of the divine love, participating in the destruction into which it throws him who acts against love: This is the meaning of atonement." Paul Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*, 114-115.

treated by theologians and exegetes since then, and

### HISTORY, FAITH, AND THEOLOGY: TILlich IN CONVERSATION

OWEN C. THOMAS

In a ten page discussion of the relation of historical criticism to Christian faith, Paul Tillich stated in 1957 that "historical research can neither give nor take away the foundation of the Christian faith" (*Systematic Theology*. Chicago, 1957, 2: 113). Eleven years earlier Emil Brunner, in a chapter-length discussion, had stated the opposite position: "In the sphere of historical science a conflict with faith is always a possibility, at least in theory.... With the incarnation of the Word the conflict of faith between historical science and faith is posited as a possibility" (*Revelation and Reason*, Westminster, 1946, 281f). I begin this paper with Tillich and Brunner because this is the way the issue arose for me. I heard Tillich lecture on this issue in the late 1940s while I was reading Brunner. I asked Tillich if he disagreed with Brunner, and he said that he did. Beginning with Tillich and Brunner, however, may narrow the issue somewhat. In this paper, I want to clarify this question, investigate how it has been

offer some suggestions that, I hope, point toward a solution. We shall see that some other authors offer options on the relation of history and faith that go beyond the issues between Tillich and Brunner. To consider them all in detail, however, would be impossible in short paper. Moreover, I believe that the issue between Tillich and Brunner is a central one in the relation between history and faith.

First, I want to indicate more concretely what Tillich and Brunner meant by their views. Tillich goes on to state: "The attempt of historical criticism to find the empirical truth about Jesus of Nazareth was a failure.... There is no picture behind the biblical one which could be made scientifically probable" (102). "The more or less probable results [of historical criticism]" are "able to be the basis neither of an acceptance nor of a rejection of the Christian faith" (103). "The Christian assertion that Jesus is the Christ does not contradict the most uncompromising historical honesty" (108). Tillich does, however, praise the enterprise of historical criticism and explain its very important contributions to theology, namely, the distinction between the empirically historical, the legendary, and the mythological elements in the Bible, and also insight into the development of

the Christological symbols. We need to inquire as to whether for Tillich this independence of faith from historical research is a matter of principle or of fact. The phrase “*can* neither give nor take away” sounds like a matter of principle. We will return to this issue later.

Tillich explains that by phrase “the foundation of Christian faith” he means the “factual transformation of reality in [Jesus’] personal life” (107). He states that this factual element is Jesus’ “unbroken unity with God” which involves no traces of unbelief (Tillich prefers “unfaith”), *hubris* or self-elevation, and concupiscence,” which he defines as the “unlimited desire to draw the whole of reality into one’s self” (126). Furthermore, there is an “analogy between the [New Testament picture of Jesus] and the actual personal life from which it has arisen. It was this reality, when encountered by the disciples, which created the picture” (115). Tillich clearly believes that the determination of the presence or absence of these traces of unbelief in Jesus is beyond the purview of historical criticism.

On the other hand, Brunner states: “The credibility of the Gospel narrative in its main features is the necessary foundation of real Christian faith” (284). “Not only the historical existence of a man called Jesus, but the credibility of the story of Jesus in its main features, and of the Gospel picture of the person of Jesus, of His teaching, working, suffering, and dying belong to the essence of Christian faith. Christian faith cannot arise, nor can it exist, without an historical picture of Jesus, or without a knowledge of the fact that this picture corresponds with reality, that He was ‘this kind of person,’ and that He lived in such and such a way, and behaved in a particular manner” (283; see also *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, Westminster, 1952, 242ff.)

Brunner grants that “When we admit this, however, faith seem to expose a very broad surface to historical criticism, and in so doing to be continuously exposed to attack” (*Revelation and Reason*, 284). But he concludes: “All conflicts between historical criticism and faith, when more closely examined, turn out to be non-existent; such ‘difficulties’ are caused either by an unjustifiable dogmatic statement of traditional historical views on the part of the Church, or by a skeptical distortion by critical science on the other” (282). “In the long run historical criticism has never been able to maintain a ‘denial’ which affected any vital point in the faith” (283).

This sounds like a matter of fact rather than principle.

The most detailed criticism of Tillich on this point has come from D. Moody Smith in his essay “The Historical Jesus in Paul Tillich’s Christology” (*The Journal of Religion* 46:1 January 1966). The whole issue is devoted to an evaluation of Tillich’s thought). Smith cites Tillich’s statement, “Faith does guarantee the factual transformation of reality in that personal life which the New Testament expresses in its picture of Jesus the Christ” (2:107). This involves the presence of unambiguous faith and love (3:145f) and the absence of any traces of unfaith, hubris, and concupiscence (2:126). He also cites Tillich’s statements, “No special trait of this picture [of the New Being in Christ] can be verified with certainty.” “Whatever faith can do in its own dimension, it cannot overrule historical judgments. It cannot make the historically improbable probable, or the probable improbable, or probable or improbable certain” (2:114, 108). Smith concludes, “But precisely because [Tillich] recognizes [the Christ event’s] concrete particular character, he cannot successfully argue that faith guarantees it. Such a guarantee of Christian faith’s historical ground is, by the very nature of the case, impossible” (139). And Moody goes on to consider the “irreducible possibility” of the appearance of seriously negative evidence in regard to the historicity of the Christian claim about Jesus, and concludes, “Theology cannot then avoid its historical character, its unavoidable involvement with history, when it faces the question about its own historical basis.” (144)

Two authors in the book *Christ, Faith and History* (ed. S. W. Sykes and J. P. Clayton Cambridge, 1972) also argue in detail that Tillich’s argument fails. John Powell Clayton in his essay entitled “Is Jesus Necessary for Christology?” and Peter Carnley, in his essay entitled “The Poverty of Historical Skepticism,” both argue in different ways that it is impossible to claim that the foundation of Christianity is historical and also exempt it from the possibility of falsification through historical investigation. Finally, Van Harvey also claims that Tillich’s thesis fails. He argues that on Tillich’s grounds that historical criticism may be able to disconfirm Christian faith. He asks, “Could historical research for example, legitimately question...that [Jesus] was a man in whom there were no traces of unbelief, *hubris*, or concupiscence?...Surely it is the province of historical research to raise such questions.” (*The Historian and the Believer*, Macmillan, 1966, p. 151)

Before we continue, I should note that other authors approach this question in rather different ways. For example, Charles McArthur in book *In Search of the Historical Jesus* (Charles Scribner's Son, 1969) defines "the historical Jesus" as Jesus "as the modern historian can reconstruct him" (19). Then he focuses on the relation of theology and history and discusses the logically possible answers to this issue. They are, first, "Total indifference to the question of the historical Jesus;" second, "affirmation of the historical Jesus as source or presupposition of the Christian community and its *kerygma*, but indifference to the determination of the historical details of Jesus' life;" third, "Insistence that certainty about *some* historical details is essential to the Christian faith and that historical research establishes the validity of these details;" and fourth, "Insistence that certainty about *some* historical details is essential to the Christian faith, but this certainty is based on some form of faith affirmation and is finally independent of historical research" (18). It would seem that the third answer represents that of Brunner, and the second answer represents Tillich's view.

Now as we consult how various other theologians and exegetes of the past half-century have treated this issue, it is important to note that my presentation of them is an interpretation that may or may not be accurate. We may also expect to find that theologians either agree with Tillich or avoid the issue, and that the exegetes will tend to reject Tillich's position and support that of Brunner, since otherwise, they would have no important role to play on this issue.

Karl Barth seems to side with Tillich. In the first place, he claims to accept the responsibility to interpret the Bible historically. "The demand that the Bible should be read and understood and expounded historically is, therefore, obviously justified and can never be taken too seriously.... It is everywhere a human word, and this human word is obviously intended to be taken seriously and read and understood and expounded as such" (*Church Dogmatics*, 1/2, T. & T. Clark, 1957, 464). Yet he also asserts that it is a mistake to adopt "modern theological historicism," that is, to attempt to "penetrate past the historical texts to the facts which lie behind the texts" (492). This comes out most clearly in his treatment of the resurrection. While he holds that the resurrection was physical and bodily (CD 3/2, 448), he also states that the resurrection is "inaccessible to 'historical' verification" (446; see also CD 4/1, 334-41, 4/2, 149f). Thus, Barth like Tillich seems to make Chris-

tian faith claims immune to historical critical assessment, and it, too, sounds like a matter of principle.

Theologian and exegete Rudolph Bultmann's solution to this question is similar to that of Barth and Tillich. He claims that Christian faith is not based on a historical report that might be critically verified or rejected. It is rather a response to a proclamation of an act of God that occurred in Christ. "No science of history can verify this assertion—either to confirm or reject it; for it is beyond the sphere of historical observation to say that in this Word and its proclamation God has acted" (*Essays Philosophical and Theological*, SCM, 1955, 18). According to Bultmann, the Gospel of John, for example, "presents only the fact (*das Dass*) of the Revelation without describing its contents (*ihr Was*)" (*Theology of the New Testament II*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955, 66). Bultmann, however, does describe the difference between a life in sin and a life in faith by asserting in various places that a life in sin is a life in bondage to the past, the law, and the world, and life in faith is a life in freedom for the future on the basis of grace (see *Essays*, 80f). This is summed up in his assertion that a life in sin is inauthentic life, and that a life in faith is authentic life. So as in the case of Tillich the question arises as to whether or not historical research is able to determine the presence or absence of the bondage or freedom in the life of Jesus to which Bultmann refers. Bultmann's answer is negative: "I do indeed think that we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus, since the early Christian sources show no interest in either" (*Jesus and the Word*, Charles Scribner's sons, 1958, 8).

Jürgen Moltmann seems to avoid the issue. In a passage entitled "The Historical Trial of Jesus," he discusses historical criticism and the earthly Jesus accessible to historical investigation and refers to the passage in Tillich's *Systematic Theology* that has been discussed above, but he does not refer to Tillich's claim about the relation between historical research and the foundation of faith (*The Crucified God*, Harper & Row, 1974, 117.) Later, he returns to this question in relation to Christ's resurrection. Here he discusses Troeltsch's three axioms of the historical critical method: probability, correlation, and analogy. He asserts that the effects of Christ's appearances on the witnesses and the empty tomb are historically ascertainable, but that Christ's resurrection is not, since there were no witnesses. He

concludes, “The sphere of remembrance of the first Christian testimonies of the resurrection is...wider than the sphere of historical research and historical judgments. Judgments of faith cannot be founded on historical judgments based on probability, but in the historical religions judgments of faith for their part make historical judgments necessary, while at the same time holding them in the balance in which judgments based on probability exist” (*The Way of Jesus Christ*, SCM Press, 1990, 243). It is not at all clear what he means here. And when a theologian is unclear, it may well indicate that he/she is avoiding an issue or doesn’t know what to say.

Wolfhart Pannenberg, who stands in the tradition of Barth, surprisingly seems to agree with Brunner. In 1964, he criticized Martin Kähler’s claim “that the real Christ is the preached Christ.” He states, “Going back behind the apostolic kerygma to the historical Jesus is, therefore, possible. It is also necessary.” He agrees with Ebeling that, “faith must have support in the historical Jesus himself. That means, certainly, in Jesus himself as he is accessible to our historical inquiry.” “Christology is concerned, therefore, not only with *unfolding* the Christian community’s confession of Christ, but above all with *grounding* it in the activity and fate of Jesus in the past.” He also argues for the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection, and concludes: “If, however, historical study declares itself unable to establish what ‘really’ happened on Easter, then all the more, faith is not able to do so; for faith cannot ascertain anything certain about events of the past that would that would perhaps be inaccessible to the historian” (*Jesus—God and Man*, Westminster, 1968, [1964], 23, 24, 28, 109). He repeats this view in 1991: “To test and justify christological statements about Jesus, christology must get behind the confessional statements and titles of the primitive Christian tradition, reaching the foundation to which these point, which underlies faith in Jesus. This foundation is the history of Jesus. Christology must ask and show how far this history of Jesus is the basis of faith.” In this volume, he also again asserts the historicity of the resurrection on the basis of historical research (*Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, Wm. Eerdmans, 1994, 282, 359-63).

Hans Frei, a follower of Karl Barth and the father of narrative theology, understands the Gospel accounts as “realistic narrative,” history-like stories which render the identity of a person, namely, Jesus Christ. He states, “Whether or not these stories report history (either reliably or unreliably)...what

they tell us is a fruit of the stories themselves” (*The Identity of Jesus Christ*, Fortress, 1975, xiv). He claims that this is the way the Bible has been interpreted from the beginning down to the eighteenth century when the historical critical approach to the Bible arose. Frei explains the background of his emphasis on realistic narrative as follows: “Now it is important to note that since the beginning of the eighteenth century, and at an accelerating pace with the development of historical criticism, this coincidence of the story’s literal or realistic depiction with its meaning has been taken to be the same thing as the claim that the depiction is an accurate report of actual historical facts. This identification of two different things is a classic instance of a category error” (Ibid.) But he does not explain why this is so, and it is not clear what he might say if he were to.

Since Frei is very concerned to distinguish these two interpretations, the question arises as to the nature of the relation between the two. His answer to this question, however, is not at all clear. On the one hand, he states, “We cannot...inquire into the ‘actual’ life and character of Jesus inferred from the records. Most scholars agree that the Gospels do not furnish us with the requisite information for such a reconstruction.” “But do we actually know that much about Jesus? Certainly not, if we are asking about the ‘actual’ man apart from the story.” On the other hand, he claims that,

About certain events reported in the Gospels we are almost bound to ask, did they actually take place? With regard to certain teachings we ask, were they actually those of Jesus himself? Nonetheless, the specific individual’s identity and the situations in which it is enacted are at this stage so often tied to their referent—the Kingdom of God—that it is quite speculative (in the absence of external, corroborative evidence) to ask, in many instances, how much actually happened, what he actually said, and how much is stylized account.... Moreover, the meaning of these texts would remain the same...whether or not they are historical.

Frei concludes as follows:

In sum, though the question of historical likelihood is bound to arise in the case of the most history-like or sharply individualistic reports, both of the sayings and of the incidents of Jesus’ life, the force or urgency of the *question* does not make a possible *answer* to it any more credible.

It is precisely the fiction-like quality of the whole narrative, from upper room to resurrection appearances, that serves to bring the identity of Jesus sharply before us and to make him accessible to us.

Faith is not based on factual evidence of inherent historical likelihood" (Ibid., 80, 103, 132, 141, 145, 151).

Therefore, it seems fair to conclude that for Frei the results of historical research are irrelevant to Christian faith, which means that he agrees with Tillich on this issue rather than with Brunner. (This is to be expected since he is a follower of Barth, but it is surprising, since he has spoken to me in very disparaging terms of Tillich's *Systematic Theology*.)

I digress here to note that the view on this issue espoused by Tillich, Barth, Bultmann, and Frei had its origin in the theologian who was Tillich's teacher, Martin Kähler, in his book *The So-called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* (Fortress, 1964; German ed., 1896). Carl Braaten, one of Tillich's students, reports that Tillich suggested to him that he should write his dissertation on Kähler and translate Kähler's book. James D.G. Dunn summarizes Braaten's interpretation of Kähler on this issue in his introduction to the translation as follows: "Is faith, then, to depend on the findings of a few scholars? Are critical historians to become the new priests and pope of Christian faith? No! To tie faith to the historical accuracy of this or that detail would wholly undermine faith. Faith looks only to the historic Christ, the biblical Christ, 'the Christ who is preached.' The biblical Christ is the 'invulnerable area' from which faith can gain its certainty without relying on the heteronomous guarantees of external authorities" (Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, Eerdmans, 2003, 72). (This sounds like a matter of principle.) Tillich states his indebtedness to Kähler, his teacher at Halle, in many of his writings. For example, "For Kähler the Jesus of history is at the same time the Christ of faith, and the certainty of the Christ of faith is independent of the historical results of the critical approach to the New Testament" (*Perspectives on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Protestant Theology*, Harper & Row, 1967, 215. The same applies to Barth (See C.D. 1/2, 64f)

Edward Schillebeeckx is one of two Roman Catholic theologians I have come across who come down largely on the side of Brunner. In his book *Jesus*, he states, "The question of whether or not to absorb the historico-critical method is one of life or death for Christianity. If Jesus, for instance, either

did not exist (as used not infrequently to be argued) or was something quite other than what faith affirms of him (for example, a *sicarius* or guerilla, a Zealot or Jewish-nationalist resistance fighter), then the faith or *kerygma* is of course incredible.... If Christian faith is faith in Jesus of Nazareth... confessed as the 'Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, our Lord,' then faith-centered knowledge and confession of the faith are indeed bounded by our knowledge of the historical Jesus" (*Jesus*, Seabury, 1979, 70f). He concludes, however, with a somewhat different point: "Historical study of Jesus is extremely important; it gives a concrete content to faith, but it can never be a verification of the faith" (Ibid., 73).

The other Roman Catholic theologian who seems to side with Brunner is Karl Rahner. He begins his discussion of this issue with the following statements:

Christology's assertion of faith about Jesus refers to a quite definite historical person and to historical events. Hence, it implies historical assertions.... This means that [these assertions] are inevitably burdened with all the difficulties and uncertainties of knowing an event which lies far back in history... There exists, therefore, an unavoidable difference and incongruence between the certainty and uncertainty of historical knowledge as such, and the existentiell significance of historical events when they belong to the past and are not experienced simply and immediately in themselves and in their own concreteness.

Faith as such of course presupposes these historical events to be absolutely true and real. But at least in a Catholic understanding of faith, there belongs among the elements of faith at least to some extent a moment of reflection about whether the events which faith posits absolutely are known historically, and whether this historical knowledge as such can be justified before the tribunal of conscience and of truth. In this respect the incongruence between the merely relative verifiability of historical knowledge as such on the one hand, and the absolute, existentiell significance of historical events and the absoluteness of faith on the other can not in principle be resolved... This situation belongs inevitably to the essence of freedom.

And obviously we have to admit that, in spite of well-founded historical knowledge about Jesus and his claim, in our case the distance between historical foundation and responsive commit-

ment is the largest distance conceivable. (*Foundations of Christian Faith*, Seabury, 1979, 233-35).

A view similar to that of Rahner can be found in that of Dunn below. On the issue we are investigating Rahner's approach seems to be an uneasy affirmation of the view of Brunner.

The last theologian we shall consider is Van Harvey whose critique of Tillich's view we have noted above. In the final chapter of his book *The Historian and the Believer*, Harvey outlines his position on the relation of history, faith, and theology. He begins by distinguishing four levels of meaning of Jesus of Nazareth: "(1) the actual Jesus, (2) the historical Jesus, (3) the perspectival or memory-impression of Jesus, and (4) the Biblical Christ" (268). He focuses on number three, which he believes represents "an authentic tradition" that includes "Jesus' ministry in Galilee, the baptism by John the Baptist, his consorting with the flotsam of his society, his crucifixion, and, above all, the basic outlines and forms of his teaching" (268). On historical-critical grounds, Harvey excludes the healing miracles, "because Jesus refuses to traffic in miracles and signs," and any reference to Jesus as the Messiah, since there is "no unequivocal claim by the historical Jesus to be the Messiah" (278-9). And it excludes all references to the resurrection, since, following Ebeling, Harvey holds that the resurrection claim "is nothing else but the expression of 'the right understanding of the Jesus of the days before Easter,'" or "'the concomitant phenomena of the faith-awakening encounter with Jesus'" (274).

In conclusion Harvey states, "No remote event—especially if assertions about it can solicit only a tentative assent—can, as such, be the basis for a religious confidence about the present" (282). He asserts that this interpretation of Christian faith stands in the tradition of the Logos theologians, F. D. Maurice, H. Richard Niebuhr, and Karl Rahner, and he labels it "radical historical confessionism" (288). However, at best it sounds very much like the Enlightenment religion of Harnack, plus the historical Jesus produced by the New Quest for the historical Jesus. It is not clear how this is coherent with his statement that his position stands in the tradition just mentioned. In a New Forward to a reissue of his book in 1996, Harvey moderates his critical attitude toward the neo-orthodoxy of his mentors and argues that there is no necessary conflict but rather a close positive relation between historical criticism and Christian faith. In any case on the relation of history

and faith, Harvey stands near the position of Brunner.

Now we turn to the exegetes and what they have to say about the issue raised by Tillich. (I should add that since I am not a professional exegete, my knowledge of this area is limited and largely dependent on the suggestions of colleagues.) I suggested earlier that we might expect that exegetes will disagree with Tillich and tend to agree with Brunner that a conflict between historical research and Christian faith is always possible. Therefore, it is with some surprise on my part that the first exegete we shall consider, John Knox, Tillich's colleague at Union and my teacher there, in fact agrees with Tillich, perhaps as a result of conversations with him.

In his 1952 book, *Criticism and Faith* (Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1952), Knox outlines a view very similar to that of Tillich. He states, "Some of these matters [in regard to the historicity of Jesus] to be sure, fall legitimately within the field of the historian and we are properly subject to his scrutiny; but it is inconceivable that he should either discredit them or give them for the Christian any needed or decisive support" (42). He elaborates this further as follows: "Biblical historical criticism not only has no stranglehold on Christian faith, but does not have in its power to destroy one jot or tittle of the gospel" (21). This does not mean, however, that history is of no concern to Christians, for "Christianity...is by definition a religion for which history is of supreme concern; a historical event is indeed the very source and center of it" (25). Knox continues: "One cannot read [the New Testament] without recognizing that the community whose life it reflects stands in the immediate glow of a great event. Something has happened which has brought the community into being, has determined its basic character, and now rules its life. This event was remembered as centering in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and was interpreted by the community as nothing less than God's decisive act for the salvation of mankind" (29). This "event has a status both of absolutely indisputable historicity and of supreme religious and theological significance" (30). However, in regard to "the circumstances and incidents which together with the responses made to them and the meanings found in them [that] constitute the event...the biblical historian has the right to speak [and] at most points [?] he alone has that right.... Christian faith and the experience of the Spirit within the Christian community can never give us the answer to this kind of question" (36). Even with

regard to the historicity of Jesus, "It is impossible for the Christian to entertain any real doubt of the existence of this person, for the *memory* of him is an essential element of the Christian life itself." (37) "Some of these matters, to be sure, fall legitimately within the field of the historian and are properly subject to his scrutiny; but it is inconceivable that he should either discredit them or give them for the Christian any needed or decisive support" (42). Although with these words "impossible," "inconceivable," and "indisputable" Knox seems to refer to matter of principle, the following statement implies that they refer to a matter of fact: "The major facts of the career of Jesus, for example—the character and quality of his life and teaching, his crucifixion under Pontius Pilate, the emergence of the church with its knowledge of the Resurrection and its faith in Christ the Lord—these facts are fully validated by historical study" (89). Here he moves in the direction of Brunner.

Knox continued to struggle with this issue ten years later in his book, *The Church and The Reality of Christ* (Harper, 1962). He asks, "Can our faith, our whole religious position, be dependent in any vital way upon historical facts so meager and uncertain?" He continues in a footnote: "This question applies in principle whether we are more 'conservative' or more 'radical' in our assessment of the historical trustworthiness of the Gospels" (15). He continues:

Since even the best attested fact of the history of the past can possess no more than a very high degree of probability and since, by definition, Christian and indeed all religious faith must from the believer's point of view be absolutely certain and secure, can faith ever be said to depend, upon a historical fact, no matter how well established? Faith must *know* its object in a way we cannot know a historical fact. It is not, it simply cannot be, as tentative, as precariously poised, as our historical knowledge must be (16).

Are we not forced to recognize that a risk [from historical criticism] would be intolerable that in actual fact it does not exist? Whatever risk the believer may be aware of taking...he certainly knows that he is not venturing anything important on the results of the researches and deliberations of historians. He knows he is not at any vital point dependent upon their findings. How then, he is bound to ask, can he be dependent upon the fact of Jesus?... 'Is this fact essential to

[the existence of the church]?' It may be argued that the answer must need be in the negative. No past fact can be essential to any actual existence. An event or personality of the past may, as far as we can see, have been an essential factor in bringing the actual existence [of the church] into being; but once it has come into being, this past fact cannot be said to be essential to it...not even the fact of Jesus (17-19).

Knox adds that these considerations "explain the rejection of dependence on 'the quest of the historical Jesus, on the part, not only of Bultmann, but also of Paul Tillich'" (Ibid). Knox concludes with a focus on the reality of the church. He states, "The fact of Jesus belongs to the process of the Church's 'becoming,' not to some prior event or development." This fact "provides a clue to the solution of our problem of how a past existence can in any true sense be essential to a present existence....Jesus is *remembered* in the Church, and has been from the beginning; and this memory is deeply constitutive of its being....I am not sure I can see how historical research could conceivably destroy this memory....Nor is the Church dependent at any vital point upon such researches for the verification of its memory" (34-35). Thus, Knox in this later book clearly sides with Tillich.

James D. G. Dunn in his massive book *Jesus Remembered* (Eerdmans, 2003) begins by tracing the history of historical criticism from its emergence in the Renaissance to its most recent stage in postmodernism. The most important section for our purposes is one entitled "The Flight from History" or the search for "an invulnerable area for faith" (67-97). Here he focuses on the tradition of the liberal theology, drawing on Schleiermacher, Herrmann, and Kant, and then on Kähler, all of whose attempts to solve this problem he judges to be failures. He concludes this section with a discussion of postmodernism which he considers to the completion of the flight from history. At this point he notes that the long history of historical criticism has challenged the "certainty of faith," and he holds that we should not expect certainty in matters of faith, since faith is primarily a matter of confidence, assurance, and trust rather than certainty (104f). He implies that one element in this lack of certainty concerns the historical Jesus. This, of course, is a point that Tillich specifically denies: "It is wrong...to consider the risk concerning uncertain historical facts as part of the risk of faith. The risk of faith is existential; it concerns the totality of our being, while the risk of his-

torical judgments is theoretical and open to permanent scientific correction. Here are two different dimensions which should never be confused" (117). Dunn states that we have no access to what Jesus actually said or did but only to what his first disciples remembered about what he said and did. So in the last section of his 1017-page book, he concludes as follows: "Through the Jesus tradition the would-be disciple still hears and encounters Jesus.... Through that tradition it is still possible for anyone to encounter the Jesus from whom Christianity stems, the remembered Jesus" (893). Dunn's conclusion seems to imply that historical research can both give and take away the foundation of Christian faith and thus he agrees with Brunner.

John Dominic Crossan does not address directly the question of whether historical research can give or take away the foundation of faith, but he does affirm the historical Jesus produced by historical research. He states, "Christian belief is (1) an act of faith (2) in the historical Jesus (3) as the manifestation of God" (*Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, HarperCollins, 1994, 200). He also states that the historical Jesus is always a reconstruction, and that reconstruction is all that we have. He concludes another work as follows: "For a believing Christian both the life of the Word of God and the text of the Word of God are alike a graded process of reconstruction.... If you cannot believe in something produced by reconstruction, you may have nothing left to believe in" (*The Historical Jesus*, HarperSan Francisco, 1991, 426). Thus he seems to imply an agreement with Brunner.

Marcus Borg does address this issue and surprisingly he agrees with Tillich. He states, "Historical knowledge of Jesus is not essential to being a Christian.... I do not think that the truth of Christianity is at stake in the historical study of Jesus ...Its truth has at least a relative immunity to historical investigation." In a note he adds: "The core validity of Christianity has to do with its ability to mediate the sacred, not with the historical accuracy of any particular claims." He adds that if faith is defined broadly as a synonym for the whole of Christianity, then historical knowledge of Jesus becomes relevant. "Images of Jesus do in fact have a strong effect on the lives of Christians....How we as Christians think of Jesus shapes our understanding of the Christian life itself" (*Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, Trinity, 1994, 192f, 199).

Norman Perrin in his book *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (SCM, 1967) distinguishes three

different kinds of knowledge of Jesus: (1) the essentially historical knowledge of Jesus which he calls "historical knowledge," (2) those aspects of (1) which can become significant in our present, which he calls "historic knowledge," and (3) knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth which is significant only in the context of specifically Christian faith, which he calls "faith-knowledge." All of these are subject to different kinds of tests and are complexly related. Faith-knowledge is based on a "faith-image" of Jesus which is the kerygmatic Christ mediated by some form of Christian proclamation and to which historical knowledge may have contributed, although the results of historical research are not a "determining factor in the constitution of this figure" (243). He adds that historical knowledge can help to provide the content of the object of faith. "The true kerygmatic Christ, the justifiable faith-image, is that [which is] consistent with the historical Jesus....To this limited extent our historical knowledge of Jesus validates the Christian kerygma; it does not validate it as *kerygma*, but it validates it as *Christian*" (244). "The early Christian equation [of the earthly Jesus with the risen Lord] justifies us using that historical knowledge [of Jesus] to test the validity of claims made in the name of *Jesus Christ* and the authenticity of a kerygma claiming to present *Jesus Christ*. To be valid and authentic these must be consistent with such knowledge as we have of the historical Jesus" (245). This seems to be a middle position between Tillich and Brunner, namely, that historical research cannot give but conceivably could take away the foundation of Christian faith.

Roman Catholic exegete John P. Meier makes a contribution to our question in his massive three-volume study *A Marginal Jew: The Rethinking of the Historical Jesus* (Doubleday, 1991). He defines the historical Jesus as "the Jesus whom we can recover and examine by using the scientific tools of modern historical research" (1:26). He goes on to contrast this with the "historic Christ" of Kähler and his followers. He criticizes their view because of the variety of definitions of "historic Christ," for their inserting strong value judgments into objective historical study, for not doing justice to the complexity of the issue, and here he refers to Perrin's distinction of historical, historic, and faith-knowledge of Jesus, and for their moving back and forth between the latter meanings (1:27-31). Meier concludes with a statement of the importance of Jesus research. In replying to the similar objections of Bultmannians and fundamentalists to such research, he notes that

this requires a move from history to theology. He concludes that the historical Jesus “is not and cannot be the object of Christian faith,” which is “the living person Jesus Christ, who now lives, risen and glorified.” Such research, however, can serve faith by avoiding the reduction of the object of faith to a content-less cipher, to a docetic or monophysitic figure, to a domesticated bourgeois figure, or to a political revolutionary. Jesus’ importance lies in his strangeness. (1:197-200). This, like Perrin, seems to mediate between Tillich and Brunner.

Roman Catholic exegete Sandra M. Schneiders, in her book *The Revelatory Text* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Liturgical Press, 1999), distinguishes the actual Jesus of the first century, the historical Jesus of historical reconstruction, the proclaimed Jesus who is the object of Christian faith, and the textual Jesus, the “proclaimed Jesus enshrined in the New Testament text.” In regard to our question she states: “In the wake of modern developments in the field of history and historiography, Christian faith itself faces a dilemma of major proportions. On the one hand, to declare the biblical text immune to scientific historical investigation is to deny the fully historical character of Christian revelation. On the other had, to admit the historical character of the biblical text would seem to imply the subjection of revelation itself, at least in its biblical mediation, to human judgment and to make faith depend upon the findings of historical criticism, a very volatile discipline” (99). She believes that the traditional approach to this issue is to assume that the task of historians is to determine whether or not the New Testament is a true and reliable account without reference to the question of the implications of their conclusions for Christian faith. She believes that this approach is “necessarily non-dialogical” and has run its course “without making much progress in resolving the dilemma.”

Schneiders continues: “I propose to reformulate the question itself,” and to ask “how the New Testament text as a medium of revelation (i.e., as a sacred scripture) is related to its subject matter, namely, Jesus the Christ as primary instance of revelation.” “The historical is a dimension of that relationship but not the whole of it, and that has serious implications for the role of historical criticism in the overall enterprise of New Testament interpretation” (100). She summarizes her view in the following way: In regard to the accuracy of the New Testament account, “If by accurate we mean exact in its facticity, we must acknowledge, with most modern exegetes, that in many respects it is not....But if by ac-

curate we mean true, that is, truth-bearing, then the answer is yes. To some extent this can be established by historical critical exegesis....The more significant guarantee of the substantial truth of the account in the gospels is the acceptance of it by the early believing community....Faith does and must enter into the question of the historical reliability of the Gospel, not as a substitute for historical investigation that must be pursued as far as it can go, but as participation in a tradition that guarantees the reliability of the whole no matter how much the details come under question or elude explication. ... Just as there is little apart from the bare outline Jesus’ life (which is already considerable) that can be ‘proved’ in the sense of established as unequivocally factual, so there is nothing of importance in the gospels’ historical account that can be ‘disproved’ or established as purely fictitious” (108-9). Although it is not really clear how Schneiders’ reformulation of the question deals with the dilemma she describes, it seems to me that she comes down on the side of Tillich.

Our last exegete is Ben F. Meyer, especially in his book *The Aims of Jesus* (Pickwick, 2002). With wide knowledge of the philosophical background of our issue, he makes a strong case for a conservative position, and takes up questions not treated by the exegetes or theologians we have discussed so far. He describes the debates about the relation of faith and historical criticism as of fundamental importance for Christianity since “they determine the relative compatibility of faith and [intellectual] integrity.” These debates have offered three possible answers to this question: (1) faith requires the renunciation of intelligence; (2) intellectual integrity requires the renunciation of faith; (3) faith and integrity are possible together, and (4) intellectual integrity positively calls for entry into the life of faith or perseverance in it (95). Meyer does not indicate which answer he favors, but it clearly is either three or four. In approaching this range of issues, Meyer first rejects “the principle of the empty head” (Lonergan) along with the accompanying “prejudice against all prejudices” (Gadamer), both of which have been used to debunk the authority of bible and tradition. They are exemplified in Harvey’s book *The Historian and the Believer*, which he criticizes at length. He begins with Harvey’s critique of miracles as impossible in the world of modern science, and asks, “whether scientific knowledge has any bearing on the judgment that miracles are impossible,” and “whether persons testifying to miracles are by that fact shown

to be incompetent, or dishonest, or self-deceived” (101).

Meyer continues, “In the gospels...the supposition of miracles is fundamentally grounded in positive openness to a divine act of salvation as the intelligible context of the miraculous. If the salvific context is overlooked, the concrete possibility of miracles evaporates.” Then he states, “We have reached a theoretical issue. Can a historian entertain the meaningfulness of ‘saving acts in history’ without abdicating his *métier*? This is the issue of whether history as a way of knowing and a kind of knowledge entails the historicist conception of a closed continuum. What in the operation of posing and answering historical questions grounds and clinches this entailment?” The answer to this question “has a powerful effect on how history is done” (101f). He says that he is “not plumping for miracles as the heart of the matter in the story of Jesus. I am simply registering the anti-docetist observation that there is a loss regularly incurred by *a priori* rejection of miracles. It lies in a certain truncating of the full sense, scope, and force of the eschatological conceptions, purposes, words, acts, and total thrust of Jesus.” (102)

Thus, Meyer holds that Harvey and the majority of the seekers of the historical Jesus in discussing the miracles focus on the “context of credibility” rather than the soteriological context of the gospels. He comments, “Enlightenment luggage litters the contemporary Western psyche” and causes it to see any claim of the authority of the Bible as “just a tool of tyranny.” This is caused by a lack of relationship to the chief matter, which comes to an expression in the Gospels and thus a misunderstanding of Jesus.

Meyer concludes with three questions: “First, what is ‘the integrity of faith’? Second, how is the integrity of faith secured in the face of history? Third, what are the purposes of history with reference to faith?” (104). In regard to the first question he states that “the New Testament [should] be taken to define normatively ‘the integrity of faith.’” Then the question arises as to how to interpret the New Testament. He suggests that there are two possible answers that he calls “non-recognitive” and “recognitive” exegesis. The first is defined by David Strauss: “The matters narrated [in the scriptures] must be viewed in a light altogether different from that by which they were regarded by the authors themselves” (*The Life of Jesus*, 40, 105). The second, recognitive exegesis, “attends to the consciously and deliberately intended sense of texts,” that is, to what Meyer calls “past particulars” (105).

To the second question about how the integrity of faith is secured in the face of history, non-recognitive exegesis answers this by “clearly severing faith from past particulars.” Then he states, “History cannot threaten faith, for faith does not bear on past events,” “does not intend, nor consequently, hinge on past particulars.” Recognitive exegetes, on the other hand, see that “the faith of the New Testament churches did indeed bear on past particulars” and that “what can be ascertained historically often falls short of what is affirmed by faith.” Meyer concludes that “faith itself somehow guarantees the past particulars it intends” in that “faith-affirmations are warranted but not by the intrinsic evidence of their objects. The warrant of faith is the fidelity of God. In this view God, not historical data, provides the ground and secures the truth of faith” (105-6). “Still faith is not pure risk...much less a *sacrificium intellectus*... Faith is refuge from illusion as from unfreedom and untruth.” “Is, then, anything absolutely guaranteed by faith?...Faith does absolutely exclude some views of Jesus, e.g., that of Reimarus” (106f).

In regards to the third question about the purposes of history in relationship to faith, Meyer states that, “history has had and continues to have a many-sided value with reference to faith. It has a corrective value, guiding an ongoing differentiation of Christian consciousness of what faith actually intends. It has an apologetic value, allowing the believer consciously to appropriate the responsible character of entry into and perseverance in the life of faith. It has an instructive value, illuminating, for example, the originality of faith by the originality of Jesus.” It seems to me that Meyer’s view approaches that of Tillich, but obviously on different grounds. Do the questions and points raised by Meyer, none of which is treated by the other authors, lie beneath or beyond the arguments offered by the others? I believe they do.

Now we see that the sixteen authors discussed above, the eight theologians and eight exegetes, are evenly divided between the views of Tillich and Brunner, with two taking what I have called a mediating position and one avoiding the question. Among the theologians, three side with Tallish—Barth, Bultmann, and Frei, four with Brunner—Pannenberg, Schillebeeckx, Rahner, and Harvey, and one avoids the issue—Moltmann. Among the exegetes, four side with Tallish—Knox, Borg, Schneiders, and Meyer, and two with Brunner—Dunn and Crossan, and two take a mediating position—Perrin and Meier. Some views are clearer than others on this

others on this issue. So my predictions at the beginning about how this would come out, that is, theologians siding with Tillich and exegetes with Brunner, were rather far off the mark.

Some questions remain. For example, are the views discussed based on matters of principle or matters of fact? Most agreeing with Brunner imply that it is a matter of fact, and those agreeing with Tillich imply that it is a matter of principle. We have seen that six authors find it to be a matter of principle, and four a matter of fact, although judgments on this issue are often not very clear since the principle involved is not elaborated, and the facts involved are indicated in only a general manner.

At this point, I should note that the mainline churches, which are officially open to the modern discipline of the historical criticism of the Bible, have not been exercised by this question. That is, it has not been a matter of public debate among them, although it has been debated at length in evangelical churches. (See Robert K. Johnston, *Evangelicals at Impasse: Biblical Authority in Practice*, John Knox, 1979, chapter 2.). Thus, the mainline churches seem to have adopted Tillich's view, probably unknowingly. This does not mean, however, that individual members of the mainline churches have not struggled with this question. I know some who have. I might add that if the mainline churches had adopted Brunner's position, they would soon discover that they were in an impossible position. By this I mean that they would face an impossible problem, namely, how to determine whether or not what they believed to be some essential element of Christian faith, especially a version of Christology, is confirmed or undercut by historical research. Whom would they consult—a national committee of their church? If so, whom would this committee consult? The SBL, or the Society for New Testament Study, or the Jesus

Seminar? Furthermore, since the scholarly consensus on a particular question would vary both within and between these groups and over time, how would this factor be handled—by quarterly reports? If so, how often would these be incorporated into the church's catechetical guides and worship? That is what I mean by an impossible situation.

Perhaps this point could be made differently. People who join a mainline Christian church as adults, as I did, are moved to do so either probably by being attracted to the Christian community or by Christian preaching, or both. Neither of these usually involves a study of the results of historical research on Jesus. If this question is raised later, it usually does not result in a crisis of faith, and the assumption is usually made that this is a question for the official teachers of the church to resolve and should be left to them. So, in effect, they also adopt Tillich's position. So interest in this question is probably limited to us scholars and some educated laity, that is, to us. So how should we deal with it?

Personal note: One factor in my (gradual) adult conversion to Christian faith began during a college major in physics and chemistry and two years of graduate study in physics followed by two years work in applied physics in the Navy during World War II. This meant that I could not consider joining a church that was not entirely open to all the critical disciplines of the modern world including the natural and human sciences, especially history. The end result of this process is that after years of reflection about Tillich's view of the relation of historical criticism and faith (and although two years ago at this meeting I listed Tillich's view on this question among the successes of his *Systematic Theology*), I have finally come down on the side of Brunner and thus in the "impossible situation" mentioned above.

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## TILlich AND THE PERSONAL GOD

DURWOOD FOSTER

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1. In his first theology term paper's first paragraph in 1906, 19 year old Tillich already states graphically the duality of the "absolute" and the "personal" God, stressing their ideal conjunction and their actual imbalance in the human spiritual life [Fichtes Religionsphilosophie in ihrem Verhaeltnis zum Johannesevangelium, FW, 1]. The mutual belongingness and profound tension between the two

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will define much of the agenda and problematic of Tillich's intellectual career.

2. In the *Monismusschrift* of 1908, preparing for his theological comprehensive, Tillich notes that while Kähler called the absolute an "idol," he sides with Kaftan that the concept is religiously indispensable. He struggles to think the personal as free from limits contradicting the absolute, and to think the absolute as having a content compatible with the personal. The first seems possible if "personal" is distinguished from "individual," which means "a being" among equals—which the absolute cannot

be. The second need is met if unbounded love and truth are conceived as the content of the absolute. Humans manifest God when they enact love and truth. But a human being can embody God fully only by sacrificing the God his/her individuality. [FW, 33-34]

3. Thus, 21 year-old Tillich, chiseling out benchmark concepts, recapitulates the definition of 6<sup>th</sup> Century Boethius, which had largely permeated Western culture: *persona est individual substantia naturae rationis*—"a person is an individual substance of rational nature." In other words, person is always *e pluribus unum*. The absolute God cannot be "a person" because the absolute cannot be an individual, or one example of many. Tillich never wavers in this logical conviction. Eventually, it is further confirmed through Martin Buber's influence: the origination of a person is always interpersonal. The "I" is constituted through "I-Thou" encounter. [*Martin Buber: eine Wuerdigung anlaesslich seines Todes*, 1965, GW, XII, 320-3]

4. While God cannot be "a person," it is possible to affirm "a personal God" because God is boundless truth and love. In the '25 *Dogmatik* Tillich proposes the term "person-like" (*personhaft*) to make this clear. "We say personlikeness (*personhaftigkeit*) to avoid the impression of an isolated personality. [It] means what carries the personality in the creature-relationship. Herewith the conflict is solved..." [p. 166]

5. Indeed, it is not only *possible* to affirm—or confess—a personal God; it is necessary to do so if the authentic meaning of God is to be expressed at all. "This holds unconditionally," intones Tillich in the *Dogmatik*, "that what concerns me unconditionally cannot appear otherwise for the person than in the I-Thou relationship" [p.166]. Compare this to *Das Daemonische*, [Main Works 5, p.109], "As antithesis to demon, (God) becomes God through grace." Thus, as ST I later asserts [p.144], "the symbol 'personal God' is absolutely fundamental," even though it "is a confusing symbol" [p. 145]. The rendering in the German edition(s) of "confusing" as "*irrefuehrend*" ["misleading"] is quite unfortunate. Tillich's intention in the ST I passage is not well expressed. What he means there, viz., that "personal God" *can be* misleading, thus, at most in German, *verwirrend*, is stated clearly in ST III, pp, 126-7. [Cf. also in this connection *The Courage to Be*, Main Works, 5, pp. 226-7.]

6. In a landmark incident, when Albert Einstein repudiated the personal God in New York City in

1940, Union Theological Seminary turned to Tillich for reply. He wrote in the *Union Seminary Quarterly* [Vol. II, 1, 8-10] that the famed scientist was right *literally* but overlooked the *symbolism* of religious speech. God is "suprapersonal," more than, but not less than personal. Though Tillich changed his mind significantly concerning the personal God, this assertion expresses a lifelong consistent conviction.

7. There does occur one major blur in Tillich's consistent witness to the suprapersonal God who is also symbolically personal. This is his exposition of the "God above God" in the *Courage to Be*, 1952 (originally the Terry Lectures at Yale, 1950). The "God above God" appears when the theistic personal God disappears in the abyss of doubt. It is the "ground of being without a special content." The "absolute faith" which is the state of being grasped by this God "says yes to being without seeing anything concrete which could conquer the non-being in fate and death" [Main Works, V, 189]. "It is accepting of acceptance without somebody or something that accepts" [Ibid, 185]. This God seems completely non-personal and thus appears to fly in the face of Tillich's usual position, cited just above. We asked him about this at Union in 1952. Not to worry, he replied, it was a matter of correlation: the Terry Lectures were for agnostic philosophers, not the theological circle. Further "damage control," or restoration of the usual position, was undertaken by Tillich in a 1961 article in the British periodical *The Listener*. It was a misunderstanding, he says there, to think the "God above God" implied the "removal of the personal God of living faith" [Main Works, 6, 418]. "God above God" means "God above the God of the theists [those who construe God as 'a' person] and the non-gods of the atheists" [Idem]. It is this positively upgraded version of the "God above God" which seems to figure prominently, though now anonymously, in Tillich's Earl Lectures of 1963 and also to be the version that inspires a fond farewell from Karl Barth in *Church Dogmatics* IV, 4. More on this below.

8. This panel today goes back to a proactive skirmish with Rob James at Duke five decades ago. Taking my Tillich seminar, Rob was enthralled with the System but balked at what he deemed its deficient personal God. I gave him an "A" for striking at a core Tillich nerve, then, where Rob cited impersonal passages, I cited personal, sometimes on the same page. I recalled what steady fire Tillich had been under at Union, from faculty *and* students, for lacking a God you could relate to. Moving to Ber-

keley I titled a lecture series “Tillich’s Two God-Models,” to have the shootout Rob provoked between Tillich and Tillich. Rob’s recent book on Tillich showed we were still in the “O.K. Corral,” and we enticed Jean Richard to join the fun or say last rites, as need might be.

9. Sifting sources unprinted or unwritten in 1958, I have expanded my diagram of Tillich to *four* God-Models. The duality of impersonal/personal is in Tillich all right, and stays there right through, but it now seems largely a schematic antithesis. The more palpable Tillichian God-models are those of the classic trinity, and are not limited to Christianity. One of the four becomes defunct in Tillich. A second, strong at first—and the salient guarantee of the Divine personhood—is weaker toward the end. A third, which began humbly, waxes greatly later, and the fourth, at one point distanced from but then melded with traits of the others, is a constant for Paulus. The first three of these models are, in traditional lingo, the trio of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and the fourth is the so-called “Godhead” or *deitas*.

10. The first Trinitarian figure—in its standard version—increasingly becomes for Tillich a negated model. He backs off, after positive beginnings, from use of God’s Fatherhood other than as *symbolic* of divine love, while conversely he is more and more at pains to warn of *this* symbol’s abuse and avoid it. A homily from the trenches of the 1916 [*Fruehe Predigten*, 470ff.] on human need for “our Father in heaven” lends the parental God the valence of subsistent reality. But in the 1925 *Dogmatik* [425ff.], for all the respect with which the symbol is treated, it is only a symbol. In *Systematic Theology* I as well, [286ff.], there is exemplary exposition of the symbol “Father,” balanced by that of “Lord” and buttressed by the “manifestation of the Lord and Father as Son and Brother” [289]. Here too, however, while the *manifestation* as Son and Brother denotes the real event of the Incarnation, the symbol “Father” does not designate anything distinctively real in God’s being. Nothing agitated Tillich more than to hear “only a symbol,” so we ask at once for the symbol’s base in reality. The answer is “creative power” expressing being-itself. There is annulment (*Aufhebung*) of the Fatherly triune *persona* into the “Godhead” as such. “God the Father” disappears as a *distinct divine hypostasis*. Correlated with this ontological coalescing of the Father with the Ground of Being, Tillich begins regularly to protest against a “personalistic theism” which would make God “a”

being. “The God of theological theism...is seen as a self which has a world, as an ego which is related to a thou, as a cause which is separated from its effect...He is being, not being itself...This is the God Nietzsche said had to be killed...” [*Courage to Be*, MW 6, 222,].

11. This rejected theistic figure is Tillich’s annulled Trinitarian *persona*, God the Father as an ontological subsistence distinct from being-itself. Do some here recall Tom Altzier claiming back in the 60s that Paulus had inspired him? Tom would tell how Paulus leaned over and whispered, “Ja, der real Tillich is der radical Tillich.” *Paulus* denied he was in the “Death of God” camp. I suggest he was one-fourth in it. God the Father as a structural hypostasis dies for Tillich. This is what I believe creates the vacuum many sense as a deficit in his personal God.

12. Generally Tillich teaches God is suprapersonal *and* symbolically personal or “person-like.” However, the second triune moment, the Son, is for young Tillich an actual person as we are. I was surprised to find, in the recently edited *Fruehe Werke*, how axial this conviction is at the outset of the career. It deserves a book-length study. I will simply note the 1911 Theses on the Historical Jesus propose to supplant the Trinity with the “dialectical relation of the Abstract and the Concrete” as intuited in God universally and God concretely in Christ [MW, 6, Thesis 127, p. 33]. Failing *logically* to integrate deity’s two poles of absoluteness and personal concreteness, Tillich posits in the *Systematic Theology* of 1913 their *paradoxical* unity in the “break-through” of revelation as *the* theological principle. This, the Logos made flesh, is the ground of Christian theology’s claim to be *the* theology, as *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, declares as late as 1951 [p.16]. Still in 1952, Hartshorne’s concern for a dipolar finite in God is met by appeal to the absolute “becoming small for us” in Christ [Kegley-Bretall, 385]. This stance is more “supernaturalist” than many realize Tillich ever was. He writes in 1913: “*Through the Son of God’s enhumanization and elevation, individual personality...has attained eternal meaning in God*” [1913 ST, FW, 373 (italics original)]. “Jesus is the concrete supernatural in person,” as *Der Begriff des Übernatürlichen*, 1915, puts it [FW, 496]. Through the Incarnation and Ascension, “God bears the features of Jesus.” That, avers the 1913 ST, “is the enormous religious paradox which lies at the root of the Trinitarian idea” [FW, 365].

13. But, to an extent hardly yet grasped, Tillich reverses his field Christologically. He never loses

normative awe at how God shines through Jesus' picture [cf. Earl Lectures, 52; Chicago final address, MW, 6, 437]. Deviation, though, from an original Alexandrian mentality paralleling Schleiermacher's, slowly creeps in. À la Antioch, it is increasingly the undistorted *divine-human relation*, not a divine hypostasis, that the Incarnation instantiates. Flat out, the 1913 ST is contradicted in ST III's Trinity section: "One cannot attribute to the eternal Logos...the face of Jesus...or historical man. God...has not lost...freedom to manifest...for other worlds in other ways" [p. 290]. Then, climactically (and patently later conceived, as editing aid Clark Williamson confirms), even the "eternal Logos" seems superseded in the final sway of "Spirit Christology" [ST III, Pt. iv, esp. 145ff]. Tillich, who often said Trinity is not an issue of the number three, seems to have annulled a second divine hypostasis and to be back (as in 1911) to a bipolar dialectic, now, though, of the absolute and the Spirit.

14. It is the Spirit indwelling Jesus that makes him the Christ [ST III, 146], and Tillich's Risen Christ "*is* (my italics) the Spirit and we 'know him now' only because he is the Spirit" [ST III, 125-6]. Tillich is taxed to conceive neatly this third way of God being God, which is not surprising in view of its manifold signification throughout theological history. His "Spirit mysticism," as Jerry Brauer named it, is definitely "cosmic" (as opposed to "acosmic") mysticism. The divine presence pervades nature *and* history. With Wordsworth above Tintern Abbey, it is "far more deeply interfused" than anything discretely describable, pantheistically weaving and elevating what ST III dubs the "transcendent unity of unambiguous life," not a centered person but "person-like" as it impinges upon us and we contemplate and prayerfully address the Godhead it manifests. In his 1943 letter to Thomas Mann [GW XIII, 26], Tillich speaks of a "romantic relationship to Nature which" he puts "over against the alienation from Nature in all" his "current colleagues." He thanks this relationship to backpacking through Thuringia in company with his Halle frat brothers. At the same time he betrays to Mann the *ressentiment* toward personal theism (here of his UTS peers) that was perhaps his most settled theologic engram or negative block.

15. There is always for Tillich, even in deepest doubt, a backdrop of deity. An unforethinkable (Schelling) we cannot deny without affirming, an unbudgeable screen on which all holy symbols are posted. To express this, for sixty years a restless

conceptuality, rigorous *and* colorful, keeps coming up to the Tillichian firing line: the absolute, the truth-itself, the infinite, the unconditioned, the Holy, ultimate concern, the ground and power of being, being-itself, and "that about which everything we say is necessarily symbolic." Should we include God above God—the "ground of being without a special content"? Surely we must! Karl Barth, after all, with a parting smile [KD IV, 4, the final fragment, 146 ET] elects "mit Paul Tillich zu redder" in praise of the "God above God." Barth proceeds to extol the biblical God, but so does Tillich in his culminating witness. "The God above God and the God to whom we can pray are the same God" [*Listener article, op. cit.*, 420]. He makes it possible "we can say 'Thou' to him and...he can address us, as a person addresses another person" [*Idem*]. The epiphany of this (if you will) biblical God above God he calls "the appearing of an ungraspable power," adding that "this 'yes and no' is the foundation of all speaking about the divine" [*Irrelevance and Relevance of the Christian Message*, 61]. Presto, catholic substance and protestant principle, incomparably measured for Paulus himself by "the *reality* (his italics) which radiates through Jesus' image [*Irrelevance and Relevance*, 53].

Compared to the segmenting ST—spread over 12 years and longer—there resounds in the final phase of Tillich a symphonie fugue of his evolved and pruned God-models. Contrapuntal idioms are identifiable though more fused. Paulus has listened, absorbingly, to Hisamatsu, to Buber, to Hartshorne and feminism, to Eliade and the Harvard freshmen. His ears are amazing. There is a coming together and still always an opening up. At the end there is a disconcerting, but glorious, *uncompletedness* in Tillich's concept of God. For him as much as Augustine "if you comprehend, it is not God" [*si comprehenderit non est deus*]. Consider that one page from the tape in ST III, there is the totally serendipitous entry of a God whose love "finds fulfillment only through the other...who has the freedom to reject and accept love" [ST III, 422]. As Alex McKelway astutely notes in his précis, this terminating coda "brings into the system a radical reversal of approach" [p. 247]. Through six decades of incandescent thematizing, Tillich's Ultimate is always supra-personal and almost always "person-like," infinitely transcendent yet (somehow, though ever less tightly) normed in Jesus the actual person, the Risen Lord who for us and all is the fulfilling Spirit. None of this is revoked. Yet, at the last, we are chal-

lenged to begin unreservedly afresh—especially with the personal God.

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**GOD IS NOT A PERSON,  
GOD IS PERSONAL**

JEAN RICHARD

Let me say first how grateful I am to Rob James and Durwood Foster for having introduced me to their lasting conversation on the Personal God. This is indeed a central issue, not only in Tillich's thought, but also in religious consciousness as such. What I would like to do here is to show why Tillich is so reluctant to the idea of "God as a person," and how he maintains nevertheless the idea of "God as personal," which is for him, as for us all, an essential feature of the Christian God.

Tillich's thesis on that matter is to be read in the *Systematic Theology* I, 244-245:

The symbol 'personal God' is absolutely fundamental because an existential relation is a person-to-person relation. Man cannot be ultimately concerned about anything that is less than personal, but since personality (*persona, prosopon*) includes individuality, the question arises in what sense God can be called an individual... The solution of the difficulties in the phrase 'personal God' follows from this. 'Personal God' does not mean that 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. He is not a person, but he is no less than personal. It should not be forgotten that classical theology employed the term *persona* for the trinitarian hypostases but not for God himself.

Now, a few comments on this Tillichian statement.

**God Is Not A Person**

1. Tillich's negation of God as a person is argued first in ontological terms. God is not a person because he/she is not a being: "God is being-itself, not a being" (ST I, 237). Against such an ontological statement stands what Tillich calls (ST II, 10) the "personalistic theology," which values biblical relig-

Expansions, corrections, or disputations in re any aspect of the above are welcome via email to >>andrewfoster@jeffnet.org<< or by telephone to 541-552-0676 or by post to 992 Golden Aspen Pl., Ashland OR 97520.

ion, where the person-to-person relation to God is most pronounced. Tillich's answer then reads as follows: "There is no ontological thought in biblical religion; but there is no symbol or no theological concept in it which does not have ontological implications" (ST II, 12).

Once again, the biblical theologian might react, saying that a foreign element is thus introduced in biblical thought, that is, a philosophical-ontological component. Such a debate tends to accentuate the contrast between God and being, between theology and ontology, between faith and reason.

2. However, if one proceeds to further inquiry, one realizes that Tillich's opposition to the idea of God as a being, as a person, does not stand finally on philosophical but on religious ground. There are indeed two moments or elements in the religious experience of God as man's ultimate concern. Here is the phenomenological description that opens the section on God in the *Systematic Theology*:

The phrase 'being ultimately concerned' points to a tension in human experience. On the one hand, it is impossible to be concerned about something which cannot be encountered concretely... The more concrete a thing is, the more the possible concern about it. The completely concrete being, the individual person, is the object of the most radical concern—the concern of love. On the other hand, ultimate concern must transcend every preliminary finite and concrete concern. It must transcend the whole realm of finitude in order to be the answer to the question implied in finitude. But in transcending the finite the religious concern loses the concreteness of a being-to-being relationship. It tends to become not only absolute but also abstract, provoking reactions from the concrete elements. This is the inescapable inner tension in the idea of God (ST I, 211).

Here we see that the problem we are concerned with is not the tension between a philosophical and a religious idea of God. It is a tension within religion itself. This is clearly stated in the Christian-Buddhist conversation we read in Tillich's *Bampton Lectures*. The typology to be found there is based upon the

dialectics of contrasting poles. As far as religious types are concerned, the poles are “the mystical and the ethical, according to the two elements of the experience of the holy—the experience of the holy as being and the experience of the holy as what ought to be. There is no holiness and therefore no living religion without both elements, but the predominance of the mystical element in all India-born religions is obvious, as well as the predominance of the social-ethical element in those born of Israel” (MW/HW 5, 311). Quite naturally, with regard to the Buddhists, Tillich will argue for the ethical-personal pole, while he will be very critical of the personal when addressing the Christians.

3. Let us now consider more closely this aspect of the discussion, within the Christian circle. It amounts for the criticism of theism, which conceives of God as a being, the highest being. Tillich raises objections against two features of theism: first, its conception of God as supranatural; second, its endeavor to prove the existence of God. One knows how Tillich opposes all proofs of God. This is most clearly expressed in the last words of his 1922 article on “The Conquest of the Concept of Religion”: “Every religion and every philosophy of religion loses God the moment it forsakes this ground: *Impossibile est, sine deo discere deum*. God is known only through God!” (*What is Religion?*, 154)

Here we see that the objection is not only philosophical but also first of all religious. God has to be given to us; this is the meaning of revelation. So, the question is not: are we able to produce proofs of God? Of course, we can; this is even the great temptation of human kind. But this is the effect of unbelief. The first mark of unbelief is indeed the refusal of our state of creature, that is, the separation from God as our Creator (ST II, 47-49); then, I would add a second mark of unbelief that would be the objectification of God, that is, the production of a God of our own by the means of proofs.

Moreover, that kind of objectification would be the futile attempt to overcome the anxiety of life, to overcome the abyss of nonsense. This is stated quite clearly in Tillich’s 1929 article on “Religions without Church”: “What do we do in such a situation? We transform anxiety into fear. Anxiety is indefinite. Anxiety has no object, it cannot be overcome. But fear has an object; with courage every fear may be overcome. So, one gets courageous while transforming anxiety into fear. One sets for oneself an object that may be feared—be it nature or society, another human being or whatever else” (MW/HW 5,

133-134). And I would add: God himself/herself. Indeed, I think I would not betray Tillich’s mind, if I were to say that God may be an objectification of our own in order to overcome the anxiety of nonsense. This might be the final objection of Tillich against the God of theism, that is, God conceived as a person.

### God Is A Person

4. However, Tillich does not simply dismiss the idea of “Personal God,” but he explains it in his own way: “‘Personal God’ does not mean that 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” (ST I, 245). This means that the ground and power of being, at the origin of the whole creation, has to be conceived as spiritual and personal, since the world blossoms out finally into a human being, spiritual and personal.

This is right substantially, but as far as the form of thought is concerned it seems inadequate, since it remains ontological, not personal. A human person does not rise under the influence of a vital power; rather, a personal “I” is brought into existence as he/she answers the call of a “Thou.” Tillich would agree to that. He writes indeed in ST III, 40: “Personal life emerges in the encounter of person with person, and in no other way.” However, I understand Rob’s uneasiness with such a statement, since it is not sufficiently elaborated and integrated into Tillich’s ontology.

5. But this is not the end of the story. Tillich goes on saying: “It should not be forgotten that classical theology employed the term *persona* for the trinitarian hypostases but not for God himself” (ST I, 245). This is a very acute observation. It reaches the heart of the problem: How to conceive of a personal God who is not a person? The question is especially significant in trinitarian theology, where three *personae* are asserted, who are not three individuals. In classical theology, the solution lies in the concept of a relation that subsists in itself, without the support of an individual being. So do we read in Saint Thomas’ *Summa* (Ia, q. 30, a. 1): “*Hoc nomen persona significat in divinis relationem ut rem subsistentem in natura divina.*” (“The name ‘person’ means in God relation as a subsisting reality in the divine nature.”)

Now, Tillich faced a similar problem with regard to the relation of God with the world: How can we save the fundamental truth expressed in the

phrase "Personal God," without the concept of God as *a* person? Tillich's solution, I believe, stands in the phrase "ultimate concern." This is indeed Tillich's first definition of God: "'God'...is the name for that which concerns man ultimately" (ST I, 211).

Let us note first how this is a non-objective designation of God. Almost all Tillich's objections against the idea of God as *a* person, are to be found in the explanation of that phrase "ultimate concern," we read in the Introduction of the *Systematic Theology*: "The word 'concern' points to the 'existential' character of religious experience. We cannot speak adequately of the 'object of religion' without simultaneously removing its character as an object. That which is ultimate gives itself only to the attitude of ultimate concern. It is the correlate of an unconditional concern but not a 'highest thing' called 'the absolute' or 'the unconditional,' about which we could argue in detached objectivity" (ST I, 12).

Moreover, faith itself is defined as ultimate concern in the lectures on *Dynamics of Faith*. There Tillich explains that an ultimate concern "demands the total surrender of him who accepts this claim, and it promises total fulfillment even if all other claims have to be subjected to it or rejected in its name" (MW/HW 5, 232). So, we understand how Tillich may enclose in the phrase "ultimate concern" the whole content of the commandment of love: "Ultimate concern is the abstract translation of the great commandment: 'The Lord, our God, the Lord is one, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind, and with all your strength'" (ST I, 11).

We may conclude that such a demanding, fulfilling, and loving God is truly a "Personal God." So, nothing would be missing, nothing would be lost from God's personal relation with us. The phrase "ultimate concern," which serves to express such a relation, is Tillich's own way to voice a subsisting personal relation that is not the relation of a person to another person. Then we understand how that same phrase "ultimate concern" may be used both as a definition of God and as a definition of faith. It is at the same time the designation of God above God, and the expression of the ecstatic state of human spirit above itself.

6. At this point of our inquiry, we realize that the equivalent of the personal in Tillich is the existential, as expressed especially in the phrase "ultimate concern." Now, let us push our investigation a step further, in order to see what would be in Tillich's words the equivalent of the I-Thou relation between

God and human being. Tillich does not ignore the Buberian I-Thou relation. It is important, however, to see in what connection he makes mention of it. In the Introduction to *The Socialist Decision*, the context is about the two basic orientations of human consciousness: "The consciousness oriented to the myth of origin" and "The breaking of the myth of origin by the unconditional demand" (trans. Franklin Sherman, 4-5). The I-Thou relation is introduced there as a comment on the idea of an unconditional demand: "A person experiences an unconditional demand only from another person. The demand becomes concrete in the 'I-Thou' encounter. The content of the demand is therefore that the 'Thou' be accorded the same dignity as the 'I'...This recognition of the equal dignity of the 'Thou' and the 'I' is justice...Justice is the true power of being" (*The Socialist Decision*, 6).

This has a strong religious flavor. Indeed, while the consciousness of the origin is endowed with a priestly character, the breaking of the myth of origin by the unconditional demand is the work of the prophets: "It is the significance of *Jewish propheticism* to have fought explicitly against the myth of origin...The priestly tradition is not abolished but it is judged by the demand of righteousness, and its cultic aspects are devalued" (*The Socialist Decision*, 20). We find something similar in the Bampton Lectures, written thirty years later. There the contrast is not between the priestly and the prophetic, but between the mystical and the ethical. However, in both writings the personal lies on the side of the ethical and of the prophetic, that is, on the side of the *ought to be*, on the side of the unconditional demand.

Now a question arises: What is, for Tillich, the relationship between justice and justification, between the unconditional demand of justice and justification by faith? One thing is sure, justifying faith does not stand on the side of the holiness of the origin, but on the side of the prophetic demand of justice, in so far as it presupposes such an unconditional demand, a demand, however, which is not fulfilled. In *Systematic Theology II*, 48, Tillich indeed writes: "In the concept of faith an element of 'in spite of' is implied, the courage to accept that one is accepted in spite of sin, estrangement, and despair," that is, in spite of a demand which is not fulfilled.

Moreover, for Tillich, justification by faith embraces not only the sinner, but also the doubter, as defined in the 1924 article on "Justification and Doubt," that is, the one who has lost all certainty:

certainty about the meaning of life as well as certainty about God (MW/HW 6, 85). Justifying faith then becomes absolute faith and absolute relation of acceptance without reference to an accepting person. This would be how Tillich conceives of a personal

relation without a person as subject. This would be the religious as well as the ontological ground of Tillich's puzzling statement about a personal God who is not a person.

**PAUL TILlich'S TRINITY: TENSION  
BETWEEN ITS SYMBOLIC AND DIALECTICAL  
CHARACTERISTICS UNDER THE  
TRINITARIAN STRUCTURE OF SYSTEM**

CHUNG-HYUN BAIK

This paper investigates Paul Tillich's understanding of the Trinity. Tillich's theological system as a whole in his *Systematic Theology*<sup>1</sup> is arranged according to the "trinitarian structure" of God, Christ, and Spirit. Within this Trinitarian framework, Tillich addresses three factors that bring about trinitarian thinking: the "trinitarian structures" within the idea of God, the "trinitarian elements" or "characters" of divine life, and the "three moments" or "trinitarian principles" such as "Abyss," "Logos," and "Spirit," which develop from the second factor.

From a careful analysis of Tillich's statements dealing with the Trinity, I find three remarkable characteristics: (a) his trinitarianly-structured system in which all the parts are closely or indirectly related to each other to form a dynamic unity; (b) his symbolic understanding of the Trinity, which is his representative contribution to the understanding of the Trinity; and (c) his understanding of the dialectical Trinity, based on his emphasis on the dialectical character of divine life. These three characteristics can be compactly expressed in this paper as follows: Structural Trinity, Symbolic Trinity, and Dialectical Trinity.

My thesis about Tillich's Trinity is that symbolic and dialectical characteristics in his understanding of the Trinity are in tension with each other under the whole system and with trinitarian structure. In order to demonstrate this, I will examine Tillich's statements related to the Trinity from his writings, centering around three volumes of his *Systematic Theology*.

## **1. Trinitarian Structure of the System**

### *1.1 Dynamic Relation under Trinitarian Structure*

At first glance, Tillich's entire theological system, as laid out in his *Systematic Theology*, seems to have a trinitarian structure. It is composed of five parts: (1) Reason and Revelation, (2) Being and God, (3) Existence and Christ, (4) Life and the Spirit, (5) History and the Kingdom of God. According to his method of correlation, each of the five parts is derived from the structure of existence in correlation with the structure of the Christian message. Each part has two correlated sections, which correspond to the questions of existence and the Christian answers. According to Tillich, the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> parts of the system, that is, Being and God, Existence and Christ, and Life and the Spirit, are the central parts representing the main body of systematic theology, and these three parts are arranged under a trinitarian structure.<sup>2</sup>

A question then arises as to whether the first and last parts also belong to the trinitarian structure of the central parts. In the first place, with regard to Reason and Revelation, Tillich suggests that it is necessary to split off some of the material from each part and combine it to form an epistemological part. This part analyzes a person's cognitive rationality and questions implied in human finitude, self-estrangement, and ambiguities of reason, and then addresses these problems by means of the concept of revelation.<sup>3</sup> Thus we can see that the part entitled "Reason and Revelation" is closely related to all the other parts in terms of its epistemological basis, for Tillich maintains that revelation is presupposed in all parts of the system as the ultimate source of the contents of the Christian faith.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Tillich asserts that the doctrine of revelation is based on a trinitarian interpretation of divine life,<sup>5</sup> which I shall investigate later. Hence the first part, Reason and Revelation, is closely, though indirectly, related to the main three parts under the trinitarian structure.

In the second place, with regard to the last part, History and the Kingdom of God, Tillich states that "History and the Kingdom of God" is independent of the trinitarian structure. However, he does not mean that the last part is totally unrelated to the main parts. Instead, Tillich suggests that it is helpful to separate only the material dealing with the historical

aspect of life from the 4<sup>th</sup> part that deals with life and the Spirit. The final part gives an analysis of human historical existence and questions implied in ambiguities of history, and then addresses the problems arising there from by reference to the concept of the kingdom of God. Although Tillich views the discussion of the kingdom of God as independent of the trinitarian structure, nevertheless it is directly related to the 4<sup>th</sup> part of "Life and the Spirit," and as a result, indirectly and closely related to the main three parts.

In brief, the opening part of "Reason and Revelation" and the closing part of "History and the Kingdom of God" have an indirect but close relation to the three central parts. This point may be confirmed by Tillich's own statements that in each part elements of the other parts are anticipated or repeated, that questions are developed anew, and that each contains the whole from a different perspective.<sup>6</sup> Though only the main three parts have a fully trinitarian structure, the other parts are closely related to it. Tillich points out that such a relation is a "dynamic unity."<sup>7</sup> It is open for new insights. And within its relation, new answers to new or old questions do not necessarily disrupt the unity between the earlier and later parts of the system. Therefore, all the parts of the system have a dynamically close relation to each other under the trinitarian structure. In this sense, Tillich's system in his *Systematic Theology* can be said to have a trinitarian structure, which is not the same as the method of correlation. To put it differently, Tillich's theological system can be characterized as the structural Trinity.

### 1.2 A Question about Tillich's Structural Trinity

Before concluding that Tillich's theological system is the structural Trinity, we need to take into consideration another point: if the three central parts are determined by the trinitarian structure, does each of them correspond to each of three Persons of the Trinity? Does God of the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of Being and God correspond to God the Father, the Christ of the 3<sup>rd</sup> part of Existence and Christ to God the Son, and the Spirit of the 4<sup>th</sup> part of Life and the Spirit to God the Spirit? Since these questions are ultimately related to the contents of Tillich's exposition of trinitarian thinking, we will put off the discussion until later in this paper.

## 2. Trinitarian Thinking

Let us turn to the contents of Tillich's Trinity. For Tillich, God as a person's ultimate concern must

be expressed symbolically, for symbolic language alone is able to express the ultimate,<sup>8</sup> and any non-symbolic use of language deprives God of divinity.<sup>9</sup> Thus Tillich gives a symbolic understanding of the Trinity, and Tillich uses an expression of "trinitarian symbols" in his discussion of the Trinity. Tillich contends that trinitarian symbols are a religious discovery, providing three factors leading to "trinitarian thinking" in the history of religious experience: first, the tension between the absolute and the concrete element in our ultimate concern; second, the symbolic application of the concept of life to the divine ground of being; and last, the threefold manifestation of God as creative power, as saving love, and as ecstatic transformation.<sup>10</sup>

### 2.1 The Trinitarian Structure within the Idea of God

Tillich asserts that the development of the meaning of God has two interdependent causes: the tension within the idea of God, and the general factors that determine the movement of history, such as economic, political, and cultural factors. Within the perspective of the tension of the absolute and concrete elements within the idea of God, he outlines the typological analysis of the history of religion. According to his schema, the concreteness of a person's ultimate concern leads to polytheistic structures, but the reaction of the absolute against them leads to monotheistic structures, and finally the need for a balance between the two results in "trinitarian structures."<sup>11</sup> This is the first factor, which leads to trinitarian thinking. At another place, Tillich explains as follows:

... the more the ultimacy of our ultimate concern is emphasized, the more the religious need for a concrete manifestation of the divine develops, and that the tension between the absolute and the concrete elements in the idea of God drives toward the establishment of divine figures between God and man. It is the possible conflict between these figures and the ultimacy of the ultimate which motivates the trinitarian symbolism in many religions and which remained effective in the trinitarian discussions of the early church. The danger of falling into tritheism and the attempts to avoid this danger were rooted in the inner tension between the ultimate and the concrete.<sup>12</sup>

Tillich lists three main types of polytheism: the universalistic, the mythological, and the dualistic. Similarly, Tillich divides monotheism into four types: monarchic, mystical, exclusive, and trinitar-

ian.<sup>13</sup> According to Tillich, each type of monotheism is aware of the tension between the absolute and concrete element, which Tillich calls the “trinitarian problem,”<sup>14</sup> and each gives implicit or explicit answers to this problem. However, according to Tillich, since the problem of the tension between ultimacy and concreteness in the living God is most satisfactorily resolved in trinitarian monotheism, trinitarian monotheism is the most appropriate one to attempt to speak of the living God, in whom the ultimate and the concrete are united. In short, for Tillich, trinitarian monotheism alone is the true affirmation of the living God.

### 2. 2 *Trinitarian Characters of Divine Life*

The second factor that leads to trinitarian thinking is the symbolic application of the concept of life to the ground of being,<sup>15</sup> that is, God.<sup>16</sup> In the 1<sup>st</sup> part of Reason and Revelation, Tillich uses a symbol of “divine life,” because Tillich says that there is an analogy between the basic structure of experienced life and the ground of being in which life is rooted. According to Tillich, the analogy leads to the recognition of “three elements” which Tillich calls the “Abyss,” the “Logos,” and the “Spirit.” The divine life is the dynamic unity of depth and form: its depth, inexhaustible and ineffable, is called the “Abyss”; its form, or the meaning and structure of the divine life is called the “Logos”; finally, the dynamic unity of the two elements is called “Spirit.”<sup>17</sup> With these three elements, Tillich relates the divine life to the doctrine of revelation, suggesting that theologians use all three terms in order to point to the ground of revelation. Tillich says:

It is the abysmal character of the divine life which makes revelation mysterious; it is the logical character of the divine life which makes the revelation of the mystery possible; and it is the spiritual character of the divine life which creates the correlation of miracle and ecstasy in which revelation can be received.<sup>18</sup>

These “three characters” such as abysmal, logical, and spiritual, are trinitarian, and Tillich asserts that this trinitarian interpretation of the divine life implies that the divine life is the basis of the doctrine of revelation.

If the three characters are considered to be trinitarian, they correspond to three persons of the Trinity. God the Father is identified as the abysmal character, God the Son as the logical character, and God the Spirit as the spiritual character.<sup>19</sup> As he further explains about the relation among them, Tillich

means that each of the three must be considered together. The three are all necessary in divine revelation. Tillich explains:

If the abysmal character of the divine life is neglected, a rationalistic deism transforms revelation into information. If the logical character of the divine life is neglected, irrationalistic theism transforms revelation into heteronomous subjection. If the spiritual character of the divine life is neglected, a history of revelation is impossible.<sup>20</sup>

All the three characters work together in divine revelation. They are all needed in divine revelation.

### 2. 3 *Trinitarian Principles*

The trinitarian characters of the divine life develop into the “trinitarian principles” in the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the System, “Being and God.” Before he discusses them, Tillich mentions divine life more extensively than in the 1<sup>st</sup> part. Within divine life, every ontological element includes its polar element completely, without tension and dissolution.<sup>21</sup> The divine life is not subject to any polarity among three polarities of ontological elements.<sup>22</sup> Rather, the elements of individualization, dynamics, and freedom harmonize with their polar elements of participation, form, and destiny.

Under the heading of “God as Life” in the 2<sup>nd</sup> part, this divine life is symbolized by “God as Spirit,” because Spirit (with a capital S) is the symbolic application of spirit (with a lower-case s) to the divine life. It is the most embracing, direct, inclusive, and unrestricted symbol for the divine life. Interestingly, Tillich suggests that the process of divine life has “three moments,” which are called as “trinitarian principles”: the first principle is the divine Abyss, depth, or power, which is the basis of Godhead and makes God God; the second principle is the divine Logs or meaning; the third principle is the Spirit as the actualization of the other two, which contains both power and meaning in itself.<sup>23</sup> At another place, the three trinitarian principles are identified as “God as ground,” “God as form,” and “God as act.”<sup>24</sup>

As mentioned in the section dealing with the three trinitarian characters, Tillich here again hints that the three principles are all needed. For example, in the Logos, God speaks divine word. However, without the second principle, the first principle would be chaos and burning fire, and so would not be the creative ground. Without it, God would be demonic, God would be characterized by absolute seclusion, and God would be the “naked absolute.”

In addition, it is the Spirit as the third principle, in which God goes out from Godself and the Spirit proceeds from the divine ground. The Spirit gives actuality to that which is potential in the divine ground and is manifested in the divine Logos.<sup>25</sup> The three trinitarian principles together express the divine mystery, which remains unapproachable and impenetrable divinity. They are all needed in order to reveal the mysterious Godhead.

#### 2.4 *The Christian Doctrine of Trinity*

According to Tillich, the three trinitarian principles are only a pre-trinitarian formula which makes trinitarian thinking meaningful. They are the presuppositions of the trinitarian doctrines of God. Again, Tillich contends that the consideration of the trinitarian principles is not itself the Christian doctrine of Trinity, and that it is only preparation for it and nothing more.<sup>26</sup> Here, a third factor is needed in order to reach the Christian doctrine of Trinity.

This third factor, which not only motivates trinitarian thinking but also makes possible the Christian doctrine of Trinity, is the manifestation of the divine ground of being in the appearance of Jesus as the Christ,<sup>27</sup> who is the bearer of the "New Being" in the totality of his being.<sup>28</sup> That is why Tillich says that any discussion of the Christian doctrine of Trinity begins with the christological assertion that Jesus is the Christ. In this sense, the Christian doctrine of Trinity is a corroboration of the christological dogma. Besides the manifestation of Jesus as the Christ, the divine manifestation of the Spirit was discussed and finally affirmed after the Nicaea council. According to Tillich, the motive for the discussion of the Spiritual manifestation was again christological. The divine Spirit who created and determined Jesus as the Christ is not the spirit of the man Jesus. The divine Spirit is God Godself as Spirit, in the Christ.

For this reason, Tillich contends that it is only after having discussed the christological assertions of Christianity that one can adequately deal with trinitarian assertions. He again maintains that christology is not complete without pneumatology, that is, the doctrine of the Spirit, because the Christ is the Spirit and the actualization of the New Being in history is the work of the Spirit.<sup>29</sup>

These considerations eventually lead to the acceptance of the threefold manifestation of God as creative power, as saving love, and as ecstatic transformation.<sup>30</sup> The threefold manifestation is expressed in divine creation, in salvation, and in the aspect of

God as the Spiritual Presence, ecstatically present in the human spirit and implicitly in everything that constitutes the dimension of the spirit. And they make it possible to suggest three divine names: Father, Son, and Spirit.

Tillich maintains that this procedure leading from the pretrinitarian formula to the Christian doctrine of Trinity is an "inner necessity."<sup>31</sup> Tillich explains as follows:

...it is impossible to develop a doctrine of the living God and of the creation without distinguishing the "ground" and the "form" in God, the principle of abyss and the principle of the self-manifestation in God. Therefore one can say that even aside from the christological problem some kind of Logos doctrine is required in any Christian doctrine of God. On this basis it was and is necessary to merge the prechristological and christological assertions about the divine life into a fully developed trinitarian doctrine. This synthesis has so great an inner necessity.<sup>32</sup>

According to this inner necessity, the Christian doctrine of Trinity is necessarily required.

#### 2.5 *Symbolic Understanding of Trinity*

However, even though such a procedure is marked by an "inner necessity," the traditional dogma of Trinity is not always in the right way. The representative example concerns the terms *ousia* and *hypostases*, or to use Latin terms, *substantia* and *personae*. In Tillich's explanation, *ousia* means that which makes a thing what it is, its particular *physis*. *Hypostasis* denotes the power of standing upon itself, the independence of being that makes mutual love possible. Then Tillich contends that the decision of Nicaea acknowledged that the Logos-Son is an expression of ultimate concern like the God-Father.

On the other hand, Tillich raises a critical question with regard to the adoption of the terms: "But how can ultimate concern be expressed in two divine figures who, although identical in substance, are different in terms of mutual relation?"<sup>33</sup> This question still remains after the divine manifestation of the Spirit is affirmed. "How can ultimate concern be expressed in more than one divine *hypostasis*?"<sup>34</sup> Tillich is claiming, in effect, that the attempt to articulate the traditional dogma of Trinity by use of these terms does not succeed. With regard to devotional prayer, for example, Tillich asks:

Is the prayer to one of the three personae in whom the one divine substance exists directed

toward someone different from another of the three to whom another prayer is directed? If there is no difference, why does one not simply address the prayer to God? If there is a difference, for example, in function, how is tritheism avoided? The concepts of *ousia* and *hypostasis* or of *substantia* and *persona* do not answer this basic devotional problem.<sup>35</sup>

Tillich concludes that this terminology only confuses the basic problem.

For another example, Tillich asks what the historical Jesus, the man in whom the Logos became flesh, means for the interpretation of the Logos as the second *hypostasis* in the Trinity? After discussing it in connection with the pre-existence and post-existence of the Christ, Tillich concludes that any non-symbolic interpretation of these symbols would introduce a finite individuality with a particular life history into the Logos, which would be conditioned by the categories of finitude.

Tillich's proposed solution to this problem is that the names Father, Son, the Spirit should be interpreted symbolically.<sup>36</sup> According to his symbolic understanding of Trinity, like every theological symbol, trinitarian symbolisms must be understood as an answer to the questions implied in the human predicament. This is the most inclusive answer and rightly has the dignity attributed to it in the liturgical practice of the church. A person's predicament, out of which the existential questions arise, must be characterized by three concepts: finitude with respect to man's essential being as creature, estrangement with respect to man's existential being in time and space, ambiguity with respect to man's participation in life universal. The questions arising out of man's finitude are answered by the doctrine of God and the symbols used in it. The questions arising out of man's estrangement are answered by the doctrine of the Christ and the symbols applied to it. The questions arising out of the ambiguities of life are answered by the doctrine of the Spirit and its symbols. Each of these answers expresses in symbols that which is a matter of ultimate concern.<sup>37</sup>

As a result of his symbolic understanding of Trinity, Tillich contends that the statement that three is one and one is three is the worst distortion of the mystery of Trinity. In addition, he criticizes the traditional dogma of Trinity, by insisting that if Trinity is meant as a numerical identity, it is a trick or simply nonsense.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, Tillich maintains that the dogma of Trinity has several dangerous consequences. One of them is a radical change in the func-

tion of the doctrine. While originally its function was to express in three central symbols the self-manifestation of God to humankind, opening up the depth of the divine abyss and giving answers to the question of the meaning of existence, it later became an impenetrable mystery which is to be adored on the altar. And the mystery ceased to be the eternal mystery of the ground of being, and it turned into a mere riddle of an unsolved theological problem and in many cases, the glorification of an absurdity in numbers. Finally, it became a powerful weapon for ecclesiastical authoritarianism and the suppression of the searching mind.<sup>39</sup>

### 3. Tension between Symbolic and Dialectical Characteristics

So far, in our analysis of Tillich's statements on Trinity, we have found that Tillich offers three characteristics of Trinity through all the parts of his *Systematic Theology*. The first one concerns his theological system, which has a trinitarian structure in which all the parts form a dynamic unity. The second and the third concern the contents of his statements of Trinity: the second is his symbolic characteristic and the third is his dialectical one. Though Tillich emphasizes that the trinitarian symbols are dialectical,<sup>40</sup> he also unwaveringly maintains that all theological language is symbolic.

Clearly the two terms "symbol" and "dialectic" do not operate at the same level: the former is related to theological languages, while the latter is limited to the understanding of Trinity. However, in the special case where the symbolic understanding applies to Trinity itself, we are obliged to question the relation between symbolic and dialectical understandings of Trinity. Here I shall show that these two characteristics are in tension.

First, while Tillich deals with the trinitarian character within the idea of God, Tillich explains that the tension between the concreteness of man's ultimate concern and the reaction of the absoluteness finally leads to trinitarian structures. The one leads to polytheistic structures, whereas the other brings in monotheistic structures. The balance between the two results in trinitarian structures. The movement from action through reaction to balance is dialectical. This assertion is supported by Tillich's explanation of "dialectical realism," which is the philosophical transformation of trinitarian monotheism. Here Tillich considers dialectical movement as a dialogue through yes, no, and yes again in a conver-

sation, or as reality moving through positive, negative, and positive again. Or, it is life's movement beginning with self-affirmation, going out of itself and returning to itself.<sup>41</sup> To be brief, the meaning of dialectic in this case is the successive or sequent movements that do not happen at exactly same time. And later movements embrace or include its preceding ones.

Such notion of dialectic reminds us of Hegelian dialectic, which moves from thesis through antithesis to synthesis. And it is applied to Tillich's understanding of divine life as the symbolic application of our experienced life. Divine life then would be the reunion of otherness with identity in an eternal process. Again, the trinitarian symbols are dialectical. They reflect the dialectics of life, namely the movement of separation and reunion.<sup>42</sup> In this case, dialectic means a sequential process.

Additionally, when Tillich deals with his three trinitarian principles which develop from three trinitarian characters, he suggests that divine life as a process has three moments. These moments are meant to be in a life process. That is, they are successive or sequent flow. The first moment or principle is from the divine abyss, and then it comes to be the second moment as the divine logos, and lastly, the two moments are united and actualized by the third moment as the Spirit. Here, God as abyss or ground, God as from or logos, and God as actualization or unity are in a diachronic, not synchronic, process.

However, Tillich's dialectical understanding of Trinity is not one-sided but it is complemented by Tillich's symbolic understanding of Trinity, the two understandings existing in tension with each other. When Tillich discusses divine life, Tillich mentions not only three moments in a process but also three elements or three characters such as Abyss, Logos, and Spirit. According to Tillich, all the three trinitarian characters are necessary in order to express the divine mystery. For example, the doctrine of revelation needs the abysmal, logical, and spiritual characters of divine life. Tillich emphasizes that each of these three characters must be used together, since all three are necessary for divine revelation. To spell out the contradictions: if the abysmal character of the divine life is neglected, a rationalistic deism transforms revelation into information, if the logical character of the divine life is neglected, irrationalistic theism transforms revelation into heteronomous subjection, and if the spiritual character of the divine life is neglected, a history of revelation is impossi-

ble.<sup>43</sup> It is important to stress that this notion of three elements or characters does not concern a diachronic relation but a synchronic relation. In this sense, we are able to understand Tillich's mention of the three-fold manifestations of God as creative power, saving love, and ecstatic transformation, or of the three aspects of God as in creation, salvation, and spiritual presence.

So far in this section, I have pointed out two characteristics of Tillich's understanding of Trinity, the dialectic and the symbolic. In a strict sense, these two characters are not compatible from the viewpoint of process. However, Tillich keeps in mind both of the two understanding. Hence a critic of Tillich, for instance, fails to penetrate Tillich's entire understanding of the Trinity, for, if we do not admit such a complementary or tensional relation, we are likely to be in danger of misunderstanding him, by emphasizing either of the one or the other alone:

But Tillich has fallen into the error of confusing the triadic structure of dialectical thinking with the triadic structure of trinitarian thinking. But the two are very different. Tillich tries to interpret the Holy Trinity through the Hegelian dialectic in order to safeguard the doctrine of God as living, i.e., the tension and movement within Godself. When he does this, the dialectic becomes much more than a method of argument or a seeking for truth—it itself determines the truth and shapes it in its dialectical mould.<sup>44</sup>

Taking into consideration both his symbolic and dialectic characteristics, we are able to answer the question about Tillich's structural Trinity, which is raised in the section 1.2 of this paper. The question is whether each of the three central parts under the trinitarian structure corresponds to each of three Persons of Trinity.

It is obvious that the 3<sup>rd</sup> part, "Existence and Christ," refers to Jesus as the Christ, that is, as the bearer of the New Being in totality of his being.<sup>45</sup> Here the focus is not on Jesus nor on the Christ, but on the New Being that is present in Jesus as the Christ. Here New Being is essential being under the conditions of existence, conquering the gap between essence and existence.<sup>46</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> part, "Life and the Spirit," deals with the Spiritual Presence as the Presence of God. God of the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of 'Being and God' has two meanings: God the Father as one Person and the Godhead himself. From this consideration it follows that it is not strictly but flexibly that each of the three central parts correspond to each of three Persons. This mixed relation between the strict sense

and the flexible sense results from Tillich's tensional understanding of Trinity between symbolic and dialectical Trinity.

#### 4. Summary and Conclusion

So far we have looked into Tillich's statements on the Trinity. We have found that Tillich offers three characteristics of Trinity through all the parts of his *Systematic Theology*. The first concerns his theological system. It has a trinitarian structure in which all the parts form a dynamic unity. The second and the third concern the contents of his statements of the Trinity. The second is his symbolic characteristic and the third is his dialectical one.

A careful analysis of Tillich's statements related to the Trinity has enabled us to point out these three characteristics of the Trinity. The first one is that his theological system is trinitarianly-structured, where all the parts are related closely yet indirectly with each other under a dynamic unity. The second one is his symbolic understanding of the Trinity. And the last is his understanding of dialectical Trinity, which is based on his emphasis on the dialectic of divine life. Each of these characteristics can be expressed in this paper as Structural Trinity, Symbolic Trinity, and Dialectical Trinity.

Through all these analyses and observations, my thesis is well grounded in Tillich's whole understanding that his symbolic and dialectical understandings of Trinity are in tension with each other under the whole system with trinitarian structure of all the parts. In this sense, the doctrine of the Trinity is not closed but open. It can be neither discarded nor accepted in its traditional form.<sup>47</sup>

This fact enables Tillich to answer to a question whether it will ever possible to say without theological embarrassment or mere conformity to tradition the great words, "In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit?" Tillich answers by saying, "I believe it is possible, but it requires a radical revision of the Trinitarian doctrine and a new understanding of the Divine Life and the Spiritual Presence."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* 3 Vols. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951 (Vol. I), 1957 (Vol. II), and 1963 (Vol. III)). Hereafter cited as *ST*.

<sup>2</sup> *ST* I, 67.

<sup>3</sup> *ST* I, 67.

<sup>4</sup> *ST* I, 67-68.

<sup>5</sup> *ST* I, 157.

<sup>6</sup> *ST* I, 68.

<sup>7</sup> *ST* II, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers Inc., 2001 [1957]), 47. Here Tillich provides several characteristics of symbols: first, they point beyond themselves to something else; second, they participate in that to which it points; third, they open up levels of reality which otherwise are closed for us; fourth, they not only open up dimensions and elements of reality which otherwise would remain unapproachable but also unlocks dimensions and elements of our soul which correspond to the dimensions and elements of reality; fifth, they cannot be produced intentionally; and lastly, they cannot be invented, but grow when the situation is ripe for them and die when it changes.

<sup>9</sup> *ST* I, 131.

<sup>10</sup> *ST* III, 283.

<sup>11</sup> *ST* I, 221.

<sup>12</sup> *ST* III, 283-284.

<sup>13</sup> *ST* I, 222-230.

<sup>14</sup> *ST* I, 228.

<sup>15</sup> According to Tillich, the term ground "oscillates between cause and substance and transcends both of them. It indicates that the ground of revelation is neither a cause which keeps itself at a distance from the revelatory effect nor a substance which effuses itself into the effect, but rather the mystery which appears in revelation and which remains a mystery in its appearance" (*ST* I, 156).

<sup>16</sup> Tillich proposes that God is neither a being nor the highest being, but being-itself, the ground of being, the power of being (*ST* I, 235).

<sup>17</sup> *ST* I, 156.

<sup>18</sup> *ST* I, 156.

<sup>19</sup> Pan-Chiu Lai, *Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Religions: A Study of Paul Tillich's Thought* (Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1994), 149.

<sup>20</sup> *ST* I, 157.

<sup>21</sup> *ST* I, 243.

<sup>22</sup> Tillich lists three polarities of ontological elements under the basic ontological structure which is self-world or subject-object structure as follows: (1) individualization and participation, (2) dynamics and form, (3) freedom and destiny (*ST* I, 168-186).

<sup>23</sup> *ST* I, 250-251.

<sup>24</sup> *ST* III, 284.

<sup>25</sup> *ST* I, 251.

<sup>26</sup> *ST* I, 251.

<sup>27</sup> *ST* III, 285.

<sup>28</sup> *ST* II, 121.

<sup>29</sup> *ST* III, 285.

<sup>30</sup> *ST* III, 283.

<sup>31</sup> *ST* III, 288.

<sup>32</sup> *ST* III, 288.

<sup>33</sup> *ST* III, 289.

<sup>34</sup> *ST* III, 289.

<sup>35</sup> *ST* III, 289.

<sup>36</sup> *ST* III, 289-290.

<sup>37</sup> *ST* III, 285-286.

<sup>38</sup> *ST* III, 284.

<sup>39</sup> *ST* III, 291.

<sup>40</sup> *ST* III, 284.

<sup>41</sup> *ST* I, 234-235.

<sup>42</sup> *ST* III, 284.

<sup>43</sup> *ST* I, 157.

<sup>44</sup> Adrian Thatcher, *The Ontology of Paul Tillich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 91.

<sup>45</sup> *ST* II, 121.

<sup>46</sup> *ST* II, 118.

<sup>47</sup> *ST* III, 294.

<sup>48</sup> *ST* III, 292.

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