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Biblical theism enhanced or transformed? An evaluation of Paul Tillich's concept of God

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The idea that a non-corporeal and invisible God can possess consciousness and feelings of concern, is not illogical. Tillich's concept of God as being-itself, though, is inadequate in explaining such a God. As we have seen, Tillich holds that God contains within himself the rational structure of Being. [See page 34] Insofar as Tillich's concept of God is ambiguous, though, it is not clear how the structures of nature are related to universal rationality. Does God create nature's structures as an artisan creates objects? Such a conception does not do justice to the terms "ground of being", "depth of being" and "power of being". These terms, however, suggest that nature imitates structures in the consciousness of the divine because the energy of the divine itself is within material objects; this implies idealism. Because it is unclear how Tillich's God is the bearer of the rational structure of reality Tillich's God-concept loses appeal.

It might also be said that Tillich's God-concept is more for philosophers than for ordinary worshippers, that Tillich's theology is strong in verbal subtlety but weak in pictorial appeal. And one could say that Tillich takes negative theology to an extreme position by denying almost every literal statement about God, and by stressing how infinitely our religious symbols miss the mark. Certainly the ordinary worshipper must find Tillich's concept of God to be lacking in concrete detail, to be abstruse and a little alienating.

This writer, though, feels that, with respect to divine infinity, Tillich's standpoint is supportable. There can be no easy picture of God, no easy translation of the concept of Spirit, no easy explanation of divine consciousness. Obviously the abandonment of

an anthropomorphic God leads to a more elaborate and a more difficult concept of God. If one is to accept the God hypothesis, one must move towards the most sophisticated view thereof. One must not be blind to the fact, though, that while theology advances, it leaves behind aspects of primitive and anthropomorphic religion which have beauty and psychological power.

Rudolf Bultmann has made it clear that we need to demythologise religion, and Tillich's theology is full of demythologising structures. Yet myth is powerful and, if Jung is right, bound to our most fundamental ways of thinking about ourselves. Quite clearly Tillich respects the powers of myth and symbol. Yet one wonders to what extent religious myths retain their force when they are generally recognisable as myths and not historical events. Is the psychological power of a myth dependent on one's believing the event to have happened, or is the myth just as powerful for the man interpreting it as a literary event? And if the archetypal nature of myth is dependent on a cultural framework, is it not possible to transcend old mythologies from within a radically transformed culture?

Modern theology will eventually help us to answer these questions. Paul Tillich's theology is important in this respect; his concept of God is an important formulation contra the more mythologically-steeped traditional concept which includes anthropomorphic "pictures" of God. Tillich is one of those theologians leading us to where we must needs go. In the not too distant future we will learn to what extent theism depends upon its own mythological structure. Paul Tillich is one of those theologians who are helping us to get to that point. What does seem

clear is that the theistic God of the future will be less easily "pictured" than "imagined". If man is to truly "come of age", his concept of God will have to move from the concrete and pictorial image to the abstract principle.

2.13. A finite God?

Even if we were to reformulate the idea of "being-itself" in terms of "absolute surrounding Spirit" via the correlative model, we would have no easily imaginable picture of God. We could, perhaps, think of God as being present as the air is present (a conceivable symbol), but such an image does not help us to understand how God can possess consciousness and feel concern. There is no "centredness" in the image. We somehow feel that there should be a central area of consciousness and concern within the divine. In a sense, we want God to be finite. Charles Hartshorne, the well-known process-theologian, argues that divine finitude is not necessarily undesirable. For, he argues, finitude implies individuation, differentiation. [Hartshorne in Kegley and Bretall, p 180, 1964] The concept of being-itself, however, implies that God has no central area of location. According to Hartshorne, God's finitude is "that which always and inevitably characterizes him". [ibid., p 181] The gist of his argument is that, paradoxically, we need to circumscribe God in order to preserve his full power - power which depends on his having an identity apart from and spatially away from the rest of creation.

Hartshorne's insistence on God's finitude is not at all convincing. Christian theology might very well claim that what "inevitably characterises God" is his infinity. But if one objected that there

must be some things we can say of God in opposition to others - for example, God is "good", not "bad" - it could be counter-argued that the term "good", as applied to God, has no analogical application in this finite world. If the point were pressed further, and it were argued that to say God is good rather than bad constitutes some kind of finite categorisation (i.e. God's nature prevents him from actualising other contradictory possibilities), we could argue in reply that this does not imply finitude at all. There are certain necessary characteristics which must be attributed to God if the existence of God is accepted. These characteristics must be predicated to give definition to the concept "God". But not even God can unite contradictory predispositions within himself; he cannot be both infinitely good and infinitely bad. He can be infinitely one or the other though, and it must be the former, for claims of conscience seem to imply a universal moral injunction. Such claims indicate that we should see God as being righteous, as he who makes a moral demand of us. [Tillich, TC, p 23, 1969] If we refer to characteristics, then, the notion of God's infinity holds.

In what other respects can Hartshorne claim to prefer the notion that God is finite? Well, as a process theologian[35] he believes that God interacts with man and that this interaction is not determined in advance. God is really affected by what man does and both God and man adapt themselves to each other on the basis of what is learnt in the interaction. From this position Hartshorne

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[35] The theological system of mathematician Alfred North Whitehead, who held that the divine-human encounter consisted of an interactional process between God and man. This interaction is possible because God has a permanent nature (primordial) and an unfixed pole (his consequent nature). Interaction takes place at the consequent pole, as it were.

criticises Tillich's use of the term "being-itself" (which he thinks implies stasis) exclusively, without also including the idea of "Process-itself".[36] [Kegley and Bretall, pp 166 and 194] In his reply to Hartshorne [ibid., p 339] Tillich is not antagonistic to the idea that there is an element of process in the divine-human encounter. But if such a process is postulated, is God not limited in what he knows about man and the future? Is God not then finite?

Tillich's writings militate against such a view. He argues that freedom and destiny stand in relation to each other in a way that preserves the meaning of both. There is an ultimate universal destiny, Tillich argues, but this destiny is not the same as fate. Fatum (that which is foreseen) implies a predetermining of events; destiny provides the conditions and limits of freedom. [Tillich, ST I, p 205, 1955] Within the eschatological framework of God's sovereign intention, there is real freedom for man. This freedom is essential for life to have any meaning at all. Without freedom man would not be man.

Now, if man's acts are genuinely undetermined, then God cannot know them in advance. But this does not mean that God is finite in any meaningful sense. Logically, the universe cannot be both free and determined at the same time. God, at creation, decides for one or the other. (It was necessary, in a sense, that he decided for freedom since life has far less intrinsic value in a determined

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[36] Hartshorne does not take the point that "being" which "lets be" is, per se, dynamic.

order).[37] And God, then, is as bound to that system as anyone else. Yet one cannot say that he is limited because of it; not even God could be thought to embrace two opposite possibilities within himself.[38]

One could go on to argue further that a doctrine of divine finitude is unnecessary and not really appealing. The doctrine could, conceivably, lead back to the anthropomorphisms one has sought to avoid. The doctrine of God's infinity is classical Christian dogma and must be upheld. Yet, as was implied earlier on, something of what Hartshorne says does hit home. There is a tension in theism between the desire to preserve the notion of God's unlimitedness and the desire to reduce him to the knowable and the imaginable. Of course it is the theist's duty to know God as far as possible, and Hartshorne is right to encourage us to describe the divine nature as best we can. Yet the full power of the God-concept depends on an insistence on divine infinity.

Tillich would say that we should use symbols to satisfy our desire for a pictorial, imaginative representation of the divine. He would remind us that anything finite can serve as a symbol for the infi-

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37 This wants arguing, admittedly; the statement is made here as a basic article of faith.

38 Except insofar as one allows for paradoxical elements within the divine nature. The paradox within Tillich's system is that God is directing creation without directing specific human actions. One could, perhaps, expand on paradoxical possibilities by saying that God has perfect knowledge of all events to be carried out without, as it were, making them happen. Yet one could not go so far as to say that God both predetermines human events and gives man freedom of choice in action and speech.

nite and he would remind us to say "not less than a symbol" rather than "only a symbol". [Tillich, NRL, in Stewart, p 211, 1955] Yet, somehow, this cannot quite satisfy. Those educated away from literal pronouncements about God may find it hard to sustain a worshipping disposition if, at the back of their minds, there persists the nagging criticism: "What we are doing is symbolic; it must be denied as much as it is affirmed". This writer supports Tillich in his views of literal and symbolic statements about God. Yet it must be conceded that literalisms and, yes, anthropomorphisms have a certain grassroots appeal. Man desires simple and concrete images of the supranatural. Yet man must come to see how hugely inadequate our symbols for God are with respect to expressing his nature.

2.14. The future

There is no doubt that, at present, there are a number of philosophical problems with the concept of God. Tillich has led and will lead, a small section of interested scholars to rethink, carefully and systematically, the most fundamental concept in theism. This is necessary. Christian theology needs to focus anew on the characteristics of invisibility and incorporeality, with respect to God. Tillich's model of God as "being-itself" has unfortunate ambiguities, but it can be built upon. In this respect, the concepts of "Spirit" and "absolute Spirit" may prove to be very helpful. Tillich's theological instincts seem correct to this writer. Traditional religious thinking has lost force because of obvious anthropomorphisms and crudities. Yet traditional theology will die hard, if it dies at all. If it does die, will a new-style theology take its place or will theism collapse entirely?

What must worry those who are attracted to Tillich's thought is that Tillich's ideas cannot easily be explained and when they are explained, they often sound heretical. It may happen that a wider and wider gulf may open between philosophical theology and popular belief. The recent widespread resurgence of charismatic churches bears testimony to a popular desire for emotive religion rather than deliberative religion. This is understandable enough. The average man has neither the time nor the inclination to be a philosopher. He does not feel the need to explore the subtleties of the doctrine of being-itself.

Yet, as was shown in chapter 1, there has been some popular response to Tillich's theology, as presented by Robinson and others. Does what has been written above imply that the "Honest to God" debate was a storm in a teacup? The answer is no. What has happened is that people in the Western world have had two models of God presented to them. Roughly described (and they are frequently but roughly understood) these models are: God as perfect person, and God as all-embracing Spirit. These two ideas are in contention for supremacy within theism.

Which will prevail? The success of the second model depends on people's willingness to look beyond their traditional nominalistic thought pattern. Letters in response to Honest to God suggest that there is popular support for Tillich.

The second model definitely strikes the right chord for some. But the second model makes more demands intellectually. Also, it demands courage of its supporters, who will be forced to move against

the mainstream of theism. This writer's scenario is as follows: the traditional model will continue to command popular support, while the Tillichian model will attract increasing intellectual interest as the anthropomorphisms of the traditional model become more and more apparent. Will this split cause a rift in the church? It will only to the extent that clergymen are philosophers as well as theologians. In the upper echelons of the church hierarchy they often are; lower down they often are not, in the strict sense.

However, there may be other areas of support for Tillich. By his concept of being-itself, Tillich has opened doors for debate between theism and other religious positions. Tillich's theology, and by extension his doctrine of God, may well gain in prestige if it can be shown that Tillichian theism has a broad appeal. The next chapter examines whether Tillich has given theism a broader accessibility.

Chapter 3

DOES TILLICH'S THEISM HAVE A BROAD ACCESSIBILITY?

3.1. A creative ground for debate

It is certainly true that Paul Tillich has created a basis for dialogue between theists and non-theists. By translating traditional religious concepts into modern and philosophical terms, Tillich has shown non-theists that Christianity can be adaptable and creative. He, along with religious thinkers such as Rudolf Bultmann and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, has helped to gainsay an impression of intransigence which conventional theism has portrayed. [Robinson, p 7, 1963]

Tillich claims to have something new to communicate to non-theists on the basis of his doctrine of being-itself. He seeks to attract the attention of atheists by presenting to them a doctrine of God which is substantially different from the supranaturalist, traditional model. For if God is no longer a being "out there" but is immanent within the world, an appeal can be made on the basis of common responses to injunctions which certain experiences seem to convey. Tillich's view is that both theists and non-theists feel the need to contribute positively towards the life-process on earth, and such a position bespeaks an unconscious faith in being-itself, the ground and source of all life.

But Tillich has not only sought dialogue with estranged members of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Two years before his death Tillich began focusing special attention upon Christianity's atti to

other faiths. In Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions, Tillich enumerates ways in which a profitable interchange of ideas may be structured. That study is fairly brief and this work seeks to draw more detailed conclusions about the accessibility of Tillich's God-concept to the eastern mind. It was mostly to Buddhists that Tillich spoke when on his pilgrimage of intercommunication [Tillich, CEWR, p 62, 1963] but his concept of being-itself can also be profitably linked to ideas of divinity found in Hinduism and Taoism.

Tillich's new translation of the Christian God-concept has helped to ensure that an ongoing inter-religious debate remains fertile. It has also led to a widespread re-interpretation of traditional theology. Undoubtedly, Tillich has injected interest and novelty into the sphere of religious philosophy. It must now be decided whether, as a result of Tillich's work, Christianity is seen as a more viable religion by those previously estranged from its doctrines.

3.2. Tillich's appeal to atheism

Sympathy for the atheist has become a recurring motif in contemporary theology. Robinson is one of a number of prominent theologians who feels sympathetic towards the atheistic stance:

> I have a great deal of sympathy also with those who call themselves atheists. For the God they are tilting against, the God they honestly feel they cannot believe in, is so often an image of God instead of God, a way of conceiving him which has become an idol. [Robinson, p 126, 1963]

The point Robinson is making is that the God which the atheist rejects is not the God which theism should uphold anyway. It is the idea of God as finite object which atheism rejects. Because such a God should be rejected, Tillich has a certain amount of respect for the atheistic position. Atheism has the valuable function of exercising outside criticism of religious doctrine, and even within the church corrective criticism is given impetus if it incorporates an atheistic perspective. [Tillich, TC, p 131, 1969] With respect to its rejection of the traditional concept of God, atheism has done theism a service according to Tillich. Against the concept of God as object, atheism is "the right religious and theological reply". [ibid., p 25]

Tillich's rejection of the idea that God is a being amongst others leads to a fresh definition of the term "atheist". As Robinson indicated, the God denied by atheism is a false god, an idol, anyway. So for atheism to remain atheism, it must reject Tillich's reformulated theism as well. And Tillich feels that the atheist may well be enticed to redefine his religious position once he has been presented with a clear explication of what is meant by the concept of being-itself. Tillich believes he can translate this concept in such a way that the atheist will find it alluring. The following well-known passage represents an attempt by Tillich to persuade the atheist to re-examine the feasibility of belief. Here the immanent aspect of being-itself is related powerfully to man's existence through the use of the word "depth" as a term of translation. Tillich introduces the idea of being-itself as the depth of being via reference to depth psychology, a school of psychology which Tillich admired and wrote much about. Yet we must advance beyond the insights of depth psychology in order to perceive the

ultimate depth of all being, which is God or being-itself. Tillich writes:

> It (depth psychology) leads us from the surface of our self-knowledge into levels where things are recorded which we know nothing about on the surface of our consciousness. It shows us traits of character which contradict everything that we believed we knew about ourselves. It can help us to find the way into our depth, although it cannot help us in an ultimate way, because it cannot guide us to the deepest ground of our being and of all being, the depth of life itself. The name of this infinite and inexhaustible depth and ground of all being is God. That depth is what the word God means. And if that word has not much meaning for you, translate it, and speak of the depths of your life, of the source of your being, of your ultimate concern, of what you take seriously without any reservation. Perhaps, in order to do so, you must forget everything traditional that you have learned about God, perhaps even the word itself. For if you know that God means depth, you know much about Him. You cannot then call yourself an atheist or unbeliever. For you cannot think or say: Life has no depth! Life itself is shallow. Being itself is surface only. If you could say this in complete seriousness, you would be an atheist; but otherwise you are not. He who knows about depth knows about God. [Tillich, SF, pp 56-57, 1948]

This is Tillich's appeal to the atheist. It is a key Tillichian passage and deserves comment. Commentary, though, must be prefaced by a few observations. Firstly, it must again be pointed out that here we are dealing with sermon material, and thus some allowance must be made for the fact that this passage is rhetorical in nature.[1] This ties in with Tillich's ontological method of theol-

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1. Thompson feels that the entire Tillichian corpus is characterised more by rhetoric than by "disputatious science". [Thompson, pp 15-16, 1981] He goes on to say that, even if Tillich is more of a rhetorician than a logician, this does not detract from the forcefulness of Tillich's work. Thompson's argument is that Tillich's method enables him to be persuasive in the field of theological debate. However, this standpoint still allows Thompson to point to areas in which he feels Tillich is logically deficient. This is only fair: rhetoric must follow the paths of reason. It is debatable, though, whether all of Tillich's work can be described as rhetorical. What must be conceded is that his sermon material is obviously so, and therefore we must make some allowance for the fact that we are not dealing with purely logical discourse.

ogy, which seeks to persuade on the basis of an appeal to common experience rather than by an appeal to logical argument. In evaluating the Tillichian text, then, some room must be left for the appreciation of the emotional forcefulness of Tillich's statements. Such latitude, however, must not prevent us from keenly examining the logic of Tillich's position. This writer is not convinced that Tillich's argument here has either logical or emotional appeal, for reasons presented below.

A psychologist might object that the subconscious depth of the human mind is the ultimate depth of personal reality and that Tillich's statement about a greater depth (i.e. the "depth of life itself") is meaningless. Tillich's reply would be that the human mind is the product of divine creation, and it thus has a creative source to which it is intrinsically related. On the basis of correlation he would argue that the human mind, through it apprehension of universal structures, can effect a state of communion with the divine intelligence. [ST I, p 29, 1955]. He would hold that the depths of thought in man point to an "infinite and inexhaustible depth", which is the creative ground of personal depth. Tillich's criticism of depth psychology is that it does not go far enough in helping man to understand himself because it does not explain the source of man's deepest and most profound feelings.

It can be argued, though, that Tillich is wrong in perceiving divinity at work within the most poignant and deep-felt experiences in a man's life. We would all recognise that life contains surface issues, then issues of more importance, and then further issues which lead us to stand and examine the very meaning of life, the very essence of our nature, the very basis for all our thoughts and

actions. The atheist would readily admit this. As much as the theist, he knows the difference between triviality and profundity. He has no difficulty in understanding what Tillich means by "depth" when Tillich translates "depth" to mean "ultimate concern" or "what you take seriously without any reservation". But he does not see why Tillich feels justified in equating the experience of "depth" with an experience of God. Is it necessarily so that that which commands our fullest attention is, at root, divine?

The answer to this question depends on the way we develop the idea of ultimate concern. Tillich claims that we all have an ultimate concern, something to which we give our fullest attention and most sincere commitment. [DF, p 1-4, 1957] He further argues that only one "object" is worthy of such ultimate concern, i.e. God, or being-itself. [ibid. p 12] The atheist could very well say, by way of reply, that most people do have a strong commitment to one or other concern. He may even agree that the proper focus of concern is the question of being i.e. of origins, meaning, existence. The atheist can easily admit that one should be passionately devoted to finding out the truth about the very essence of reality. But he will argue that there is no answering correlative, no presence of being which can be experienced as the answer to the question of being.

This is the point at which Tillich's appeal to atheism stands or falls. As has been established, Tillich's theology is a theology of experience. If the power of being is not experienced at the moments of "depth" in one's life, then Tillich has failed to reach the atheist. But even when he characterises the Ground of Being

which constitutes the element of depth in existence, the characterisation contains an element of ambiguity.

"Human intuition of the divine," says Tillich, "always has distinguished between the abyss of the divine (the element of power) and the fullness of its content (the element of meaning), between the divine depth and the divine logos." [Tillich, ST I, pp 277-278, 1955] Here Tillich identifies the divine depth with the abysmal element of the divine. Section I of Systematic Theology is important for the explanation of what Tillich understands by divine depth; divine depth is the correlative of the "depths of life, of our ultimate concern" (see page 101). When man finds himself at the boundary of his understanding, when he asks the question of being, the intensity or depth of his question is answered by a correlative experience of the power of being (the abyss or depth of being).

Of the abysmal principle Tillich writes: "The first principle is the basis of Godhead, that which makes God God. It is the root of his majesty, the unapproachable intensity of his being, the inexhaustible ground of being in which everything has its origin. It is the power of being infinitely resisting non-being, giving the power of being to everything that is." [ST, p 278] The basis of Tillich's appeal to atheism is that the atheist knows of such a "power of being", has experienced something of being's majesty and awesomeness.

The atheist, though, may well deny having had such an experience. Even theists are not always convinced of the reality of divine power at the depth of their being. A.L. Griffith, a minister of religion,

writes: "What I find in the 'depth' of my being is not God, but misery and sin". [In Edwards and Robinson, p 105, 1963) The idea of being expressed here is that if one plumbs the depth of one's own finitude, one encounters the negation of being, not its power and presence. Griffith is here denying the force of correlative thinking; by implication, he feels that religious truth must come to finite man via revelation from a source to which man is not intrinsically related. He denies the effectiveness of a religious philosophy of immanence.

Many philosophers have found that the contemplation of the ultimate has produced a sense of meaninglessness and alienation in their lives. For Sartre, the root experience of despair gives way to nausea. Camus's Mersault reflects the indifference of one who has found emptiness at the heart of existence. At the close of The Myth of Sisyphus suicide is rejected on behalf of a stoic heroism.[2] It is nobler, Camus implies, to endure existential torment than capitulate in the face of ultimate nothingness. [Camus, pp 109-111, 1957] Man's victory in the face of meaninglessness is overlaid with the irony of the absurd perspective. "Being" is not characterised positively; it is neutral and uncaring.

Because of such experiences, Macquarrie is unwilling to use the word "God" and "being" as synonyms. [Macquarrie, PCT, p 115, 1977] He

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[2] In The Courage to Be Tillich claims that stoicism is the only alternative to Christianity within the western framework of thought. [CTB, p 21, 1979] Either one affirms (as Christianity does) a faith in the beneficent power of being, or one affirms life by way of defying that which threatens to render inoperative our lives, our tenets of morality, our apprehension of meaning and purpose in the universe.

points out that to call being "God" means that one has adopted an attitude of faith towards being (or being-itself). "Some people, he writes, "experience being as indifferent or alien". [ibid] Thus the term "being" does not translate the term "God" for many people. So Macquarrie prefers the term "holy being" and throughout Principles of Christian Theology he attempts to show why being should be considered to be holy. The very fact, though, that he admits that many do not experience being as holy, indicates why Tillich's appeal to atheists does not succeed. The atheist may well experience the "abyss" of being as an abyss in a different sense to the sense that Tillich gives the term.

The term certainly carries an ambiguity. "Abyss" conveys the meaning of immeasurable depth, which is the use to which Tillich puts it. It can, however, also imply vast emptiness, nothingness. Both meanings translate the sense of the awesome wondrousness one experiences when contemplating the infinite. But, when pondering the universe's ultimate depth, the atheist does not perceive the fullness of being, but the absence of meaning.[3]

There are basically two ways of perceiving ultimate reality, as Hick has pointed out. Either the universe is intelligible or it is a "mere unintelligible brute fact". [Hick, PR, p 21, 1973] It is this second opinion which the atheist embraces, and so for him "depth" implies the ultimate mysteries of the laws of energy and matter.

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[3] As we have seen, being and meaning go together in Tillich's system.

It is interesting to see how Richard Rubenstein preserves the idea of God as the abyss of the divine, while at the same time holding on to the term "Nothingness" as an epithet for the divine. [Rubenstein, ME, p 185, 1970] But whereas the atheist uses the term "Nothingness" to denote a void of being and meaning, Rubenstein uses the term "Holy Nothingness" to describe "an indivisible plenum so rich that all existence derives from his very essence. God as the Nothing is not absence of being but a superfluity of being". [ibid]

Rubenstein, in the same passage, describes this God as "the ground and source of all existence", so it is clear that it is Tillich's God-concept that he is appropriating here to elaborate on his own concept of God. But then why does he describe the abysmal element of God (as defined by Tillich) in terms of "Nothingness" if being-itself is a "rich and indivisible plenum"? Rubenstein answers that, because God is infinite, he cannot be defined. He bears no resemblance to anything in the finite world, and in this sense must be described in terms of Nothingness, i.e. unfathomability. [ibid]

So, when Rubenstein refers to God as Holy Nothingness, he is not taking an atheistic stance. Rather, he is advocating a God-concept which is close to Tillich's in that he stresses the difficulty of comprehending and expressing that which belongs to the realm of the infinite. However, Tillich would never use the term "nothingness" to describe the infinite depths of being because ontology defines "being" in opposition to "nothingness". It thus seems most inappropriate for Rubenstein to equate "the ground and source of all

existence" with "Holy Nothingness", because he is using a Tillichian term to translate something which suggests its opposite.[4]

What is important from all this is that one cannot draw on Rubenstein to establish a connection between Tillich's view of ultimate reality and the atheistic view. "Holy Nothingness" is a term which suggests the difficulty of anything but a minimal definition for God. But within the boundaries of that admission, Rubenstein perceives the same depth of being as Tillich perceives. Thus, Rubenstein's "Nothingness" is not the "nothingness" of the atheist. His contribution does not bridge the gap between theism and atheism.

Tillich, though, says that the abysmal element in God's nature must not be considered in isolation. It must be considered alongside the "logos" element within the overriding category of Spirit. [Tillich, ST I, p 278, 1955] The first principle needs to be given content by the second: "Without the second principle the first principle would be chaos, burning fire, but it would not be the creative ground." [Ibid] The abysmal element, thus, has superimposed upon it the element of form, order, creative intelligence. The atheist is, accordingly, asked to re-evaluate his impression of being (that which is) in terms of the fact that there is harmony and order evident in creation.

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[4] Further, within the framework of ontology, the term "Holy Nothingness" is an oxymoron.

After all, one's perception of the world around one may be said to come as a unified vision or Gestalt,[5] and an apperception of order would colour the vision in favour of the idea that there is a powerful presence at the depth of the universal process. Order is first noticed in the perception of structures in nature. This realisation is followed by an awareness of higher categories of order and harmony i.e. the transcendentalia, esse, verum, bonum. [Tillich, TC, p 15, 1960] For life to have meaning and structure, there must be absolutes of being, truth and goodness. Awareness of God is awareness of the infinite, or the Unconditioned, [ibid, p 23] and that which is Unconditioned must be identified with absolute being, and must preserve within its being absolute truth and goodness.

So, when describing such an "awareness" of the "unconditioned", Tillich is hoping to prompt a response from the atheist in terms of an overall impression of reality which unites a sense of naked power (the abysmal element) with a sense of intelligent creativity (the logos element).

To the extent that these two elements appear in nature, Tillich's appeal can be compared with the appeal implicit within the design argument for the existence of God. It could be argued that in na-

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[5] Tillich dislikes the idea that the awareness of the divine be described in terms of Gestalt experience, for then such an awareness is too close to what Tillich calls "intuitive" apperception. [Tillich, TC, p 23] It is more than this. Awareness of the divine comes as "an element of power, as demand" [ibid]. The point being made here, though, is that the awareness described is a unified experience i.e. one does not consciously or unconsciously break it down into its "abysmal" and "logos" elements. To describe this undifferentiated experience, the word "Gestalt" is used.

ture we perceive an element of naked power harnessed by structures of form and order. Some people, at any rate, will be grasped by that vision.

Yet there are many for whom that vision does not appear. Hume has pointed out that any existing world will look designed because any surviving universe will be made up of stable and operationally integrated elements. [See Hick, AEG, p 10, 1979]

Even then, elements of chaos are apparent within the overall structure of harmony, and these elements of chaos produce occurrences such as earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, tidal waves. Such occurrences lead man to question the "logos" structure of reality and the benign character of the God who is said to have created that structure. Other factors like illness and disease may also lead to a view of reality that rejects the possibility of a loving and sustaining presence in the universe.

These "arguments from evil" are still the most popular when it comes to opposing the view that the "power of being" may be apprehended within our existential situation. Tillich's view rests on the belief that "being" eternally overcomes "non-being", or, in simple terms, the view that that which sustains and promotes life is continually seen as overcoming the forces that seek to destroy life and negate its value. For Tillich, there is a force at work in the universe which seeks to bring all of created reality to an ultimate fulfilment, an eschatological destiny. [ST 1, pp 204-205, 1955]

Those that reject this view perceive a perverse and life-denying force within the nature of the creatures that inhabit the earth.

Through the arguments of his Philo in Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, Hume speaks of "the curious artifices of nature" which "embitter the life of every living being". [Hume, p 62, 1966] He goes on to outline the predatory nature of life in the animal kingdom and follows this with a savage indictment of man, the creature who should display a dignity which would separate him from the behavioural dispositions of wild beasts. Yet human endeavour is characterised by "oppression, injustice, contempt, contumely, violence, sedition, war, calumny, treachery, fraud". [ibid., p 63]

The perspectives of those who do not apprehend the guiding power of being within the life process cannot be dismissed. Obviously one takes up a position of faith when one asserts that "being" is continually triumphing over "non-being". Those who point to the problem of evil show how it is possible to reject a fideistic position. "All is suffering," said the Buddha, and there are many whose Gestalt is dominated by this impression.

Now a detailed examination of Christian theodicy is not possible here, and Tillich's place within theodicical tradition would also take some time to outline. It may be profitable, though, to examine Tillich's view on one area of human endeavour by which view he hopes to persuade us that his Gestalt may be correct. Tillich holds that man (as part of created reality) seeks to celebrate and communicate with a power which he perceives beyond himself. Through his own creativity, does man not seek communication with the ultimate power of creativity? In his art and in his culture, does man not seek to capture the very essence of truth, of goodness and, by doing so, seek to establish precisely what it means to be? Is not the whole

of serious creativity related to a desire to come into contact with the transcendentalia? Is the artist not one who desires to penetrate the depth of life?

In Theology of Culture Tillich writes:

> I would say that every style points to a self-interpretation of man, thus answering the question of the ultimate meaning of life. Whatever the subject matter which an artist, however strong or weak his artistic form, he cannot help but betray by his own style his own ultimate concern, as well as that of his group, and his period. [Tillich, TC, p 70, 1969]

Thus the artist stands at the forefront of his society's culture, reflecting the ultimate concern of his society, but also reshaping and redirecting it. As Thompson points out, it is consistent with Tillich's respect for the neo-Platonic-Augustinian tradition that he describes artists as "a special category of people". [Thompson, p 151, 1981] These purportedly sensitive and dedicated people are held to be society's cultural leaders and the chief moral commentators in every age because they are most keenly aware of man's intrinsic relation to the divine. They point to man's ultimate inseparability from the absolute. [ibid]

We could say, then, that it is the artist (rather than the scientist or the philosopher)[6] who keeps society theonomous. In opposition to autonomy and heteronomy, theonomy "asserts that the superior law

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[6] Scientists and philosophers generally confine themselves to purely rational discourse. The artist, however, practises a discipline which combines rational elements with feelings, emotions, intuition and will. The artist is thus more likely to exhibit the kind of "ecstatic faith" which Tillich feels is necessary for real insight into the nature of reality.

is at the same time, the innermost law of man himself, rooted in the divine ground which is man's own ground". [Tillich, PE, pp 56-57, 1966] Every work of art, (though obviously some more than others) raises questions as to meaning and value in life. Within all such endeavours, there is an implied search for the ultimate i.e. for that which gives meaning and value to life: "There is no style which excludes the artistic expression of man's ultimate concern". [Tillich, TC, p 72, 1969]

Now many artists would say that they are not trying to promote a religious world-view; on the contrary, they are seeking to do the opposite. But Tillich's reply is that we must not define religion too narrowly. The religious state is the state of being "ultimately concerned" and, to the extent that the artist reveals a concern for life, he is religious. But the very fact that he produces works of art reveals that the artist does care for life. He desires to participate in the process of "being" by creating, just as being itself creates. The dedicated artist, then, is a religious man whose very immersion in his work points to a reverent devotion to that which lies at the depth of being and meaning.

This argument has some force insofar as creative participation in life implies a desire to relate to what exists around one. A commitment to life is implied in such activity. Artistic creativity may be seen as an act of courage in spite of the fact of non-being. [Cf. CTB, p 152] Art represents an affirmation of life in that artists wish to communicate with others; they feel they have something to say. This type of affirmation of life can even be discerned in the work of those who reflect the great evils of our time. Such people exhibit a radical concern about life which is

still religious, even if their artistic creations display attitudes of horror, revulsion and despair. In Protestantism and the Contemporary Style in the Visual Arts, Tillich singles out Picasso's "Guernica" as a great Protestant painting. This is because of the radical nature of the questions it raises, not because of any implied theological answer to the problems of our time. The work identifies Picasso as a profoundly religious painter. [Tillich, PCSVA, pp 307-11, 1957]

Such an argument, though, cannot compel acceptance. It is logically possible that someone who affirms life through art should nevertheless reject the idea that he is communing with being-itself. He might very well admit to a longing for absolute values, but could justifiably say that he believes man will have to create such absolutes for himself. He could, with Sartre, hold that it is man's task to invent man, and that his task does not involve the embracing of being-itself in order to realise his own nature. [Sartre, p 34, 1978] His whole affirmation of life could be explained in terms of a humanistic concern. If man has no divine creative ground (let us assume "nature" to be his creative ground), that does not mean that he must proclaim himself wretched and adopt a negative stance towards all human endeavour.

The artist, then, could claim that his participation is participation in the collective affairs of man. What Tillich would interpret as an attempt to penetrate the depth of being-itself, the artist could interpret as an attempt to penetrate the depth of insightful expression so as to inform the collective consciousness of man. The artist, then, is man's ally in humanity's movement from alienation to actualisation. Even when the artist has but a meagre

audience, or no audience at all, it is the depth of his own humanity that he seeks to explore. His motivation may be his own actualisation.

Now Tillich claims that at the depth of human history and at the depth of one's personal history, God or being-itself may be encountered. [SF, p 59, 1948] And he is quite sure that it is this encounter which is sought when the artist sets out to address the condition of man. For if it is contended that man is in a state of alienation from which state he may progress, he must be alienated from something. That is, the humanist has some conception of a state of being in which man is healed or reconciled. Human endeavour, and particularly artistic endeavour, is conducted within the framework of a conception of what essential humanity is.

Tillich makes this point in connection with the existential philosophies of Sartre and Heidegger. [Tillich, TC, p 121, 1969] Tillich finds it inconsistent of Sartre to claim that man's existence precedes his essence, and then go on to talk of man being estranged, alienated, i.e. separated from that to which he essentially belongs. Sartre must, then, have some intuition of an essential nature towards which man is grasping. Heidegger talks of authentic existence in opposition to inauthentic existence, and Tillich argues, in the same way, that Heidegger must have a preconceived idea of man's essential being if he can differentiate between what is authentic and what is not [ibid].

What is this preconceived idea of essence that philosophers and artists reach towards in their attempts to explore the nature of humanity? Tillich answers that it is being-itself that is being

sought, the very ground and creative source of all life. Man has a notion of what he essentially is because he is intrinsically related to the divine. "Man discovers himself when he discovers God; he discovers something that is identical with himself although it transcends him infinitely, something from which he is estranged, but from which he never has been and never can be separated." [TC, p 26] As we have seen, Tillich believes that a strong correlative bond exists between man and God. From his point of view, Sartre and Heidegger have some idea what actualisation would imply for mankind, because they too are drawn towards the power of being, union with which brings man to his fullest actualisation.

In ontological terms, God is essential being (being that depends on nothing for its existence) while man is an existent being (contingent and finite). According to Tillich, existent being longs for reintegration with essential being. Man, by the very nature of his being, can only find satisfaction when he is open towards his divine ground. Only the power of being-itself can address the anxiety of finitude. [CTB, p 194]

Does such an argument convince the humanistic atheist? The answer must again be no. Both Sartre and Heidegger could argue that their vision of fulfilled humanity is based on perceived potentials within man. If man has unactualised potentials at present, and if evils exist that can be redressed, then man's goal becomes the fulfilment of such potential and the elimination of such evils. Sartre holds that man's essences is yet to be decided [Sartre, pp 28-29, 1978] but that does not mean that the direction Sartre would point us in would be arbitrary. Both theist and atheist have closely corresponding ideas on morality. The difference between

them lies in the fact that the theist says man strives towards a moral code which is given, that is, it is inscribed upon the consciousness of man; the atheist says that such a code is built up on the basis of experience and common sense.

No argument Tillich presents can logically convince the atheist that his propensity towards justice is a result of a divine justice presented to man by God. Finally, it is a matter of faith, faith which depends on the forcefulness with which an impression of an answering presence is stamped on the questioning subject. For those who feel that the universe is blank and void of a meaning-presenting being, no argument will suffice. Tillich's appeal to a sense of the divine depth within us is an appeal outside of formal logic, as he admits. [TC, p 26] Those who deny the awareness of the Unconditioned in their lives, but still seek to promote life, can claim to be servants of humanity and a deeper knowledge. It is tenable for them to argue that their endeavours seek to answer man's needs, not the demands of a cosmic injunction. The atheistic response to Paul Tillich has generally been negative. Novak writes: "It seems certain... that although Tillich spoke clearly enough for a great many believers, he never broke down the difficulties which prevent non-believers from understanding him." [Novak, p 59, 1967] This is so, but it must be pointed out that the misunderstanding of Tillich has not been the only or even the main reason for atheistic rejection of his ideas.

Atheists who follow the train of Tillich's persuasive rhetoric, perceive that the theologian is attempting to effect a "conversion by definition". [ibid., p 57] What is meant by this is that Tillich proposes to inform atheists that they are unconscious

believers: they do not have to change what they believe to become theists, for the definition of theism has been changed. "For," as Tillich claims, "if you know that God means depth, you know much about Him. You cannot then call yourself an atheist or unbeliever." [Tillich, SF, p 57, 1948] If one is aware of a profundity and seriousness below the surface of daily life, then one has come into contact with the God of theism. Or so Tillich claims.

Now, we have seen how this argument fails throughout its various formulations.At the end of the discussion the atheist remains unconvinced and may even resent Tillich's attempt to "reclassify" him. As Novak says, "Atheists and theists dislike being mistaken for one another", [Novak, p 57] and Griffiths corroborates this when he says that "Atheists and agnostics rarely respond to a 'recasting' of religious truth, and they resent nothing more than being treated as unconscious believers". [In Edwards and Robinson, p 102, 1963] The attempt to incorporate non-theists by redefinition has been described by Robinson as the attempt to "bounce all atheists and agnostics into the camp of believers". [Edwards and Robinson, p 261] This quotation's lightness of tone bears testimony to Robinson's belief that such verbal reclassification has not been effective in changing the atheist's view about himself. For even when the atheist looks at life in its profoundest depths, when he asks himself the most penetrating questions about the universe, he may yet receive no sense of an answering presence. And until he does, Tillich's appeal to him will have no force. O'Dea reinforces this point by pointing out that, for many, what is encountered at the "limit-situation" is simply a void. "Whereas the religious man affirms a 'something more', the non-religious man sees simply a 'nothing else'". [O'Dea, p 31, 1966]

3.3 Freud and the experience of ultimacy

We have seen that the argument from ultimacy fails. There is one atheistic hypothesis, though, which seeks to show why the experience of ultimacy is necessarily related to religion for many people. Freud argues that man's religious response to what is encountered at the boundary between finitude and infinity is a product of fear rather than a product of an encounter with a loving presence.

"Freud," says O'Dea, "presents a striking picture of how the limit-situation impinges upon man in situations of ultimate contingency, powerlessness, and scarcity." [O'Dea, p 31] Freud's analysis of the "limit-situation" appears in The Future of an Illusion. The analysis of the religious experience presented here provides us with a theory which may be as cogent as Tillich's in explaining the etiology of religion.

For Tillich, the religious experience arises as a response to the experience of the presence of being, which is encountered as the Unconditioned. [Tillich, TC, p 23, 1969] For Freud, the experience of ultimacy is a confrontation with an intractible Nature, which is described as having a "crushing supremacy" over man. [Freud, FI, p 37, 1949] "Nature," writes Freud, "destroys us, coldly, cruelly, callously." [ibid, p 26] Man's response to the callousness of nature[7] has been the defensive strategy of the cre-

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[7] Freud cites five examples of nature's destructive ways: earthquakes, floods, storms, diseases and death. These forces establish nature as "sublime, pitiless, inexorable" [FI, p

ation of culture: "It was because of these very dangers with which nature threatens us that we united together and created culture, which, amongst other things, is supposed to make our communal existence possible. Indeed, it is the principle task of culture, its real raison d'être, to defend us against nature " [Ibid]

Religion stands at the centre of culture as that which bolsters the "felt imperfections of culture". [FI, p 37] Only an ultimate power can satisfy the anxieties of the finite creature (here Tillich and Freud agree) and such a power, according to Freud, has been projected onto nature. The projection is anthropomorphic - "It is... natural for man to personify everything that he wishes to comprehend" [ibid, p 39] - and the personification is in the form of the "exalted father". [Freud, TT, p 147, 1961]. This projection is a result of the root longing in all religions, "a longing for the father". [ibid, p 148] Thus, the gods of antiquity were condensed into a unified father figure. [FI, p 33]

Freud's analysis is close to Tillich's in that both recognise that the religious response takes place at a level of "depth" experience. Both men recognise the anxieties implicit within the realisation of finitude. Both men have something to say about how such anxiety may be dealt with. Both know that the religious attitude represents man's most fervid response to the threat of finitude or non-being.

The differences between Freud and Tillich are fundamental when it comes to interpreting the character of "being". For Tillich, being has a "logos" structure as well as an abysmal element. This logos

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27] and so the fabric of civilisation is weaved to protect us from feelings of helplessness.

structure conveys to man a sense of purposefulness, sustaining energy and loving creativity. [ST I, p 278, 1955] That which is at the root of all life carries within itself the meaning-bearing structure of all life. The abysmal element, as we have seen, conveys the sense of God's power and majesty.

Now Freud, too, knows of a "logos" structure in nature insofar as "observations of law and order in natural phenomena" can be discerned. [FI, p 30] However, this order must be understood as being part of nature per se, and must not be seen as a product of divinity. The lack of purposefulness and teleological direction in such a presentation of nature makes the abysmal element more frightening, for nature becomes a raw and naked power, entirely indifferent to man's fortunes because it carries no implicit "meaning" within it. It simply does what it pleases within its self-defining structures.

Again it must be said that the choice between two such conflicting views about nature is dependent on an apperception of reality which must needs contain a large degree of subjectivity. Tillich believes we can trust what he terms "ecstatic faith" [DF, p 6, 1957] the state of man in which all faculties are united in a response to the overwhelming presence of being-itself. Freud would have rejected such experiential claims. He sums up the agnostic position with respect to inward knowledge of universal truth when he makes the following declaration:

> There is no appeal beyond reason. And if the truth of religious doctrines is dependent on an inner experience which bears witness to that truth, what is one to make of the many people who do not have that rare experience? One may expect all men to use the gift of reason that they possess, but one cannot set up an obligation that shall apply to all on a basis

> that only exists for quite a few. Of what significance is it for other people that you have won from a state of ecstasy, which has deeply moved you, an imperturbable conviction of the real truth of the doctrines of religion? [Freud, FI, p 49, 1949]

This passage represents a potent challenge to a doctrine of religious inwardness, such as the Tillichian one, that the meaningfulness of being may be apprehended through our "relatedness" to being-itself. For, as much as Tillich has insisted that a sense of the presence of being is available to all at the point where we confront our own finitude, Freud is right in saying that only a comparatively small number of people have been convinced that this limit-experience has actually brought them into the presence of the divine. Tillich has failed to convince man that the experience of finitude is, in essence, the religious experience. For the very reason that finitude does induce fear, the religious interpretation of the character of being must always be subject to doubt because of the possibility of wishful projection. Even those who feel grasped by that which is experienced as "an element, a power, a demand" [Tillich, TC, p 23, 1969] must admit the possibility that their experience could be the result of projection.* Unless, of course, we accept the view that such an

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* Such an interpretation may become increasingly hard to resist. Freud has told us much about the power of the subconscious, and it is now not hard to believe that religious "experiences" have their origin within the subterranean depths of our own inventiveness. Further, if the parapsychologists are to be believed, the mind is capable of far more than religious self-delusion. In his book Miracles, D. Scott Rogo propounds the theory that "physical" miracles (such as stigmata, bleeding statues, levitation, healings, etc.) may well be the result of psychic activity. If such a possibility is granted, it is relatively easy to accept that man's religious ethos may have had its genesis in the presently unfathomable depths of the human psyche.

experience is self-authenticating. Macquarrie is insistent that it is not. [Macquarrie, PCT, p 88, 1977] If he is correct, then we must again conclude that Tillich's appeal to the atheist fails.

With respect to culture, and the artist's propensity to interact dynamically with the "life-process", we have a possible answer to Tillich in Freud's thinking. This answer has been implied in preceding pages. Tillich's view is that the artist answers the call of being-itself and seeks to create because being-itself is creative. His commitment to the analysis of that which surrounds him, bears testimony to the artist's concern to penetrate reality and thus facilitate his and our encounter with that power which underlies everything.

Freud, on the contrary, implies that artistic creativity serves to build up the cultural edifice which stands between man and his horror of nature. [FI, p 26f] What is being answered is not the call of being-itself, but the call of society for an artistic environment which will protect man against the awefulness of finitude. Even the critical artist who protests against his society's culture is still, in a sense, affirming it. After all, he places his work before it, indirectly touting for society's approval. Even he who seeks to bring society face to face with finitude, is still building a cultural defence against finitude: the terrors of nature are described in familiar terms and are encountered from within identifiable artistic frameworks. The result is inoculation. The truly cynical artist is the one who renounces his craft and never creates again.

It is certainly possible to use both Tillich and Freud's arguments to show that those who create are life-affirming agents. But Tillich's artist and Freud's artist affirm life very differently. Tillich's man creates in response to a cosmic injunction; Freud's man creates in response to a need for social and personal inoculation. The creative drive is an implicit one for both men, emerging from a deeply felt need. How are we to decide between Tillich and Freud's interpretations on this issue?

Ultimately, the argument depends on personal predisposition, one's way of "seeing things". What has to be admitted is that Freud's interpretation of the religious impulse has a strong appeal and represents a coherent, viable, interpretative option. Tillich's challenge to the atheist certainly can be met by a Freudian analysis, at the level of rational cut-and-thrust. We must remember, though, that it is an experienced reality that both men are attempting to describe and, of course, their respective categorisations of the "limit-situation" depend on subjective impressions.

The theist, on the basis of his own experience, might well point out that Freud does not take into account the extent to which man finds nature fascinating and alluring. Why concentrate solely on its destructive elements? The reply to this is that the finite creature will naturally find his environment stimulating, but a careful examination of the workings of nature will compel the view that it is wholly indifferent to man's well-being. Nature might be inspiring, but it is ultimately predatory: after all, a dead man cannot enjoy its beauty. In the face of death, however, the Christian still senses a power at the depth of nature which fasci-

nates him and which gives him the courage to believe in an eternal life. [Tillich, ST, I, p 307, 1955] Freud, though, says that such belief is a result of wishful projection. [FI, pp 32-33]

So, again, we have two interpretations of an aspect of the "limit-experience". And again it must be said that, although Tillich may well be right about there being a sustaining power at the root of existence, his attempts to compel a general affirmation thereof have failed. There are many people who testify to having experienced the presence of the Unconditioned and many who deny having had any such experience. Concerning those who claim such an experience, though, Freud provides a coherent counter-theory concerning their claims. In the end, one decides because of faith. Tillich's writings can delineate the nature of such faith and the type of experience it rests upon, but Tillich cannot compel acceptance of his belief that God may be encountered at the level of man's ultimate concern.

Against him, at present, is a general feeling of religious discontent, which feeling lends support to Freud's view on man's "limit-experiences". Also against Tillich is the fact that all experiences contain ambiguous elements within them, and thus it is hard to draw specific theological conclusions from so-called "religious experiences".

In the end we must conclude that Tillich's appeal to the atheist has failed in the sense that it has not prompted a widespread, positive response. Yet Tillich's assertions that there is an answering presence at the depth of being is one that will continue

to convince those for whom the religious experience has been a life-changing event.

3.4. Radical Theology's appropriation of Tillich

Instead of bringing atheists to an awareness of God, Tillich has inspired certain theologians to move towards a position which is very close to atheism.[9] These theologians are called "radical theologians" and they cite Paul Tillich as their philosophical mentor:

> Paul Tillich is, as Thomas Altizer has suggested, the father of contemporary radical theology. Every one of today's radical theologians was either Tillich's student or was profoundly influenced by his writing. In the context of much of today's theological writing, Tillich seems almost conservative. Nevertheless, all radical theologians have elaborated on themes which are at least implicit in Tillich. After all, it was Tillich who asserted in The Courage to Be that the God whom Nietzsche said was dead was transcended in a 'God above the God of theism'. [Rubenstein, AA, p 243, 1966]

This passage points to the fact that the radical theologians have developed implicit Tillichian doctrines rather than explicit ones. And, certainly, they have taken Tillich's doctrines to extremes that Tillich himself rejected. [See Rubenstein, PS, p 162, 1974] Altizer, for example, takes Tillich's statement that the "God-above-God" must be sought by believers, and he couples it with Tillich's strongest statements about God's immanence. The result

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[9] The radical theologians are not atheists in that God has a place of sorts within their system. They may be more accurately described as a-theists in that they have moved away from theism, as will be shown.

is a God who becomes identical with nature, whose being is poured out into creation.

Tillich's God-above-God concept is meant to convey neither a radical immanentism nor a different God from the God of theism. To be sure, Tillich talks about "acceptance of the God above the God of theism" [CTB, p 181] but he is talking of a God above the God of traditional theism, not a God above theism per se. That this is so can be seen from the way Tillich goes on to identify God. Tillich describes him as the "power of being" [pp 181-182]; therefore Tillich is simply promoting his idea that the theistic God should be defined as being-itself. It is the transcendent God of traditional theism who is being denied, albeit in quite dramatic fashion.

Altizer agrees with Tillich that the transcendent God, the God of Otto and Barth, must disappear for such a God is "the ultimate source of alienation and repression". [Altizer, AFT, p 310, 1965] When that God disappears, only then can we affirm "the God beyond the Christian God, beyond the God of the historic church, beyond all which Christendom has known as God." [Altizer, RTDG, pp 100-101, 1966] Here Altizer pushes a Tillichian idea too far, to the point that God is no longer the God of Christian tradition. We have seen that Tillich maintains important emphases from the traditional concept of God, while stressing neglected factors. The notion of God as ipsum esse, for example, is not foreign to the Christian tradition. [See, for example, Tillich, HCT, p 189, 1968.] Tillich's desire is to remain within the "theological circle" as far as is possible [ST I, p 13] and not to point to a God beyond all which Christianity has known as God.

Altizer, along with William Hamilton, elaborates a theology in Radical Theology and the Death of God, which stresses God's immanence totally at the expense of his transcendence. The book is dedicated to Tillich; inappropriately so, since Tillich always balanced divine immanence with transcendence, preserving the idea of the "otherness" of God alongside his doctrine of divine immanence within the world.

Altizer and Hamilton present a bizarre scenario in which God literally dies. This is the most extreme expression of radical theology, because for other radical theologians, the death of God is a cultural rather than a literal reality. And yet, it is not so much that God has died as that he has been transformed. According to Altizer and Hamilton, from the time of the Incarnation, God embarked on a process whereby he "poured" himself into spatio-temporal reality. As a transcendent being, then, God dies. However, his presence is still somehow dimly felt through His cosmic immanence. "The death of God," writes Altizer, "abolishes transcendence, thereby making possible a new and absolute immanence, an immanence freed of every sign of transcendence". [Altizer, GCA, p 154, 1966]

Such absolute immanence is necessary, Altizer contends, because man needs autonomy and the transcendent God holds man in psychological bondage. What transpires, then, is a divine suicide on behalf of creation. Such a theology takes Tillich's stress on divine immanence to a wild extreme and its interpretation of the "God-above-God" concept virtually eliminates God altogether. Is

Tillich really responsible for inspiring such a patently unorthodox and theologically unacceptable religious scenario?

The answer to this must be negative. It is undoubtedly true that Tillich has prompted creative thinking in theology and his own ideas (e.g. the idea that God is not a being alongside other beings) have prompted speculative and creative thought. Radical theological questioning, naturally, may prompt even more radical speculation. This is a risk that creative and untraditional thinkers like Tillich take. Tillich did not intend to prompt radical formulations beyond the bounds of what are recognised as the basic tenets of Christianity. Nevertheless, to the extent that radical theology has brought a freshness to religious discussion, Tillich could claim a success. For, as long as the question of ultimacy is asked, theology is being promoted.

It might be asked whether the "atheism" of radical theology might not be attractive to atheists of more standard leanings. For the atheism of Altizer and Hamilton is not "proper" atheism, since some implicit awareness of God survives in the universe (and here Altizer and Hamilton are not far away from Tillich). For Altizer's God-concept emerges between the dialectical extremes of the traditional God and the God who is pronounced dead. J.W. Montgomery explains Altizer's theology in terms of the belief that "from the ashes of God's pyre will rise, like the phoenix, a 'God beyond God'. [In Murchland, p 35, 1967] This is a more positive belief than atheism pure and simple, even if this God is to be found only after the Church and its traditions have been left far behind, as Altizer insists they must be. [RTDG, p 100-101]

Hamilton, too, is not the complete atheist he is sometimes said to be. It is interesting to note that the atheistic theologians of our time, in spite of their anti-metaphysical attitude, end up time and time again with God. Hamilton denies both the possibility of talking positively about God and the possibility of having any experience of him, yet we find conflicting statements in his text. In Radical Theology and the Death of God he writes: "My Protestant has no God, has no faith in God, and affirms both the death of God and the death of all forms of theism." [p 37] However, a few pages later, he states the positive implications of his wholly negative position:

> There is an element of expectation, even hope, that removes my position from classical atheisms... If God is not needed, if it is to the world and not to God that we need to repair for our needs and problems, then perhaps we may come to see that he is to be enjoyed and delighted in. Part of the meaning of waiting for God is found in this attempt to understand what delighting in him might mean... Our waiting for God, our godlessness, is partly a search for a language and style by which we might be enabled to stand before him once again, delighting in his presence. [ibid, p 41]

This positive assertion of the re-emergence of God "in spite of" the present experience of his absence, is Tillich-inspired. Hamilton hopes to find God within the world and this may be interpreted as an affirmation that God can be found at the "depth" of worldly affairs owing to his immanent presence, which somehow survives the dissolution of his transcendent being. Also, the very idea that an affirmation of being may come out of a situation of dissolution and despair, is a key theme of The Courage to Be.

It may then be argued that instead of producing atheism amongst theologians, Tillich may well have helped disillusioned theists to express that disillusionment within contexts that still leave some

room for God. If the concept of the "God-above-God" has been distorted by Altizer and Hamilton, at least something of its spirit has been retained. If Tillich has given theologians a licence to approach the theistic tradition more freely, he has also given them a radical perspective on religious affirmation. The Courage to Be closes with these words: "The courage to be is rooted in the God who appears when God has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt". [Tillich, CTB, p 183, 1979] These words encourage those anxious believers for whom God seems to be receding. Tillich helps them to keep a foot inside the "theological circle". In this radical fashion, Tillich has broadened theism's appeal.

3.5. Tillich and secularisation in Radical Theology

Modern man has found it increasingly necessary to "secularise" the world. This means that the world-denying attitude of much religious discourse has been rejected. The world is a fitting place for man to locate himself within, and he need not reject his home in the search for a higher "spiritual home".

The desire for a secularised world need not involve the idea that God must be excluded from a scenario of modern life. On the contrary, many theologians have welcomed the age of secularity, and have formulated sympathetic theologies. Tillich plays a role in the secularity debate. What must be decided is whether his contribution towards the definition of secularised religion helps to forge a new religious understanding which appeals to modern man.

Tillich is important to secular religion in that he has emphasised God's immanence. Secularists have applied the idea of God's

immanence to the issue of secularity in the following way. If God is no longer located in a transcendent realm where he is one being amongst others, then the whole notion of a holy realm separate from the world disappears. God is immanent within his creation and, therefore, there is but one universal realm, not a sacred one alongside a secular one. There is no transcendent realm towards which man strives and there is no transcendent God with whom we have to deal. The profane world provides all the opportunities man needs to live a full and rewarding life. One is as much "with God" in our daily work as at any other time. It is wrong to think that we need to withdraw from secular activities, so as to come into contact with God:

> This is the essence of the religious perversion, when worship becomes a realm into which to withdraw from the world to "be with God" - even if it is only to receive strength to go back into it. In this case the entire realm of the non-religious (in other words, "life") is relegated to the profane, in the strict sense of that which is outside the fanum or sanctuary. [Robinson, pp 86-87, 1963]

Such thinking owes something to Paul Tillich's theology, for the concept of God as being-itself brings God back into the world, and an immanentist theology is best able to overcome the uncomfortable separation of the sacred and profane realms. It has certainly been wrong of theologians to set up a dualism between God and the world, as though "deciding for God" implies a converse condemnation of secular life. God has not rejected the work of his own hands (see Psalm 138:8); neither should we reject the world. "From all eternity," writes B. Engelbrecht, "the choice concerning the world was God's own, and from all eternity He has decided for the world, for creation in its entirety, for man with the totality of his existence." [Engelbrecht, p 14, 1980] Tillich's theology, in which

God is presented as being closely associated with the world, serves to remind us that God loves his creation. Thus Tillich helps serve the cause of religious secularity in breaking down the distinction between the world of the sacred and the world of the profane.

The nature of the inter-relationship between the realms of the sacred and the profane is outlined by Tillich in an important passage in the first volume of Systematic Theology:

> The secular is the realm of preliminary concerns. It lacks ultimate concern; it lacks holiness. All finite relations are in themselves secular. None of them is holy. The holy and the secular seem to exclude each other. But... the contrast is ambiguous. The holy embraces itself and the secular, precisely as the divine embraces itself and the demonic. Everything secular is implicitly related to the holy. It can become the bearer of the holy. The divine can become manifest in it. Nothing is essentially and inescapably secular. Everything has the dimension of depth, and in the moment in which the third dimension is actualised, holiness appears. Everything secular is potentially sacred, open to consecration. [ST I, pp 241-242]

This means that the finite world is rooted in the infinite world (beings participate in being-itself), and so the very notion of secularity seems self-contradictory - "Everything secular is implicitly related to the holy" and so "Nothing is essentially and inescapably secular". As opposed to the heteronomous and autonomous world views, Tillich's is theonomous. [PE, pp 56-57] In the only existent realm, God may be powerfully experienced as the Unconditioned depth of being at the heart of all life and culture. Within the secular world, then, a sense of holiness is experienced which brings with it a demand for man's allegiance. [TC, p 23]

Now Tillich's position represents one pole in the debate about the role of religion in a secular society. At the opposite pole stands

Nietzsche, who held that "God is dead as far as man's consciousness of Him is concerned". [Tillich, HCT, p 497, 1968] Tillich, on the other hand, sees the world as being imbued with the divine presence. And it is precisely because Tillich's world is so "God-laden" that other religious secularists like Bonhoeffer reject Tillich. The whole point of supporting religious secularity, they argue, is to support the notion that man requires far greater autonomy in his own affairs than in previous ages. Man has "come of age"[10] and does not need the tutelage of God nearly as much as formerly. Man also does not require a claustrophobic sense of God's presence, which would keep turning man away from his own affairs towards a secondary realm of "depth". In any case, these men deny that such a "depth" experience is a reality in men's lives. Bonhoeffer suggests that the experience of ultimacy described by Tillich is fading, and that it is possible to conceive of a time when man will no longer feel the need to ask ultimate questions:

> Even though there has been surrender on all secular problems, there still remain the so-called ultimate questions - death, guilt - on which only "God" can furnish an answer, and which are the reason why God and Church and the pastor are needed. Thus we live, to some extent by these ultimate questions of humanity. But what if one day they no longer exist as such, if they too can be answered without "God"? [Bonhoeffer, LPP, p 146, 1956]

This is a strange question for a clergyman to ask, for it presents the possibility that man might eventually be scientifically and psychologically equipped to dispense with his feeling of dependence on God. Bonhoeffer sees such a development as positive. He does not seek to deny the existence of God, but he believes that man must

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[10] An expression often used by, and associated with, Bonhoeffer.

cease to use the God hypothesis as a stop-gap for man's lack of explanation about his own world. "The God of traditional religion", writes Miller, "was a 'God of the gaps', a God invoked to fill up the gaps in our understanding of the cosmos and ourselves." [Miller, p 224, 1972] In an almost superstitious way, man turns to the God hypothesis when his own efforts towards understanding fail. Bonhoeffer implies that the God hypothesis should be dropped in connection with such causal "propping up". [Bonhoeffer, LPP, p 187, 1967] Instead of seeking God as the source of everything requiring explanation, man should realise his own autonomy over the world, and become self-reliant.

To the extent that he believes that human knowledge and culture represent creative responses to the power of being, Tillich differs sharply from Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer, here, is more in sympathy with the atheistic existentialists, who feel man must define himself and live without appeal to a trans-worldly reality for explanations or sustaining energy.

Indeed, the desire for God is not much felt, according to many religious secularists. Explaining Bonhoeffer's line of thought, Miller says that the German theologian believed that "man is not incurably religious, there is no religious a priori, no God-shaped blank in the human soul, no numinous consciousness is required, and St Augustine was simply wrong when he said that the heart is restless until it finds its rest in God". [Miller, p 224, 1972] This position is opposed to the Tillichian one, for Tillich supports Augustine's ontological theology of experience, which revolves around the idea that our knowledge of God is derived from a strong experience of his presence in the world. [Tillich, HCT, p

111-112] The assumption behind Bonhoeffer's position is that man's relationship with God will change as man learns to become more and more self-sufficient. The implication is that Tillich is hankering after a mediaeval view of God and that modern man is bemused at Tillich's assertion that man seeks God at the heart of his existence. Thus Bonhoeffer's famous pronouncement on Tillich:

> Tillich set out to interpret the evolution of the world itself - against its will - in a religious sense, to give it its whole shape through religion. That was very courageous of him, but the world unseated him and went on by itself: he too sought to understand the world better than it understood itself, but it felt entirely misunderstood, and rejected the imputation. [Bonhoeffer, LPP, pp 147-148, 1956]

Downing feels that we need to choose between Tillich and Bonhoeffer. Tillich, he feels, wants everything religious whereas Bonhoeffer is proposing a state of autonomy for man. Downing feels that Bonhoeffer is right because "modern man is interested in... 'penultimate' things, not 'ultimate'". [In Edwards and Robinson, p 131, 1963] One wonders, though, whether man's immersion in the affairs of the world (of penultimate things) is not a means whereby ultimate issues can be conveniently forgotten about. Must no man, even when he has explained death and guilt as scientifically as possible, seek to know about the very origin of the universe in which such states are realised? And, even more importantly, can man really be asked to continue his daily life without the belief that something greater than he is, is right close at hand ready to fill him with the courage and determination to carry on living? If God's presence may be presented as inducing claustrophobia, it may also be presented as providing a loving "surround" for man, from which realm he may draw that energy he requires to live life confidently and joyfully.

One reason for supporting Tillich in this debate is that the God whom Bonhoeffer is pointing to, is one who withdraws further and further form the world back into the transcendent realm. Thus it appears that Bonhoeffer is re-establishing the old sacred-secular dichotomy. Bonhoeffer, though, does not see his theology as one in which the sacred and secular realms diverge. He sees the realms united by the unifying work of Christ. Summarising Bonhoeffer's position as outlined in Ethics, Miller says: "Two-sphere thinking denies the unity of God and the world achieved in the revelation and work of Christ. There is no God apart from the world, no supernatural apart from the world, no sacred apart from the profane. Christ is the ultimate reality and the world is part of that reality." [Miller, p 225, 1972] So the immanent principle is preserved through the revelation and the work of Christ, both of which are continuing. For each generation rediscovers the "primordial" or "classic" revelation of Christ [See Macquarrie, PCT, p 90, 1977] and new disciples answer the call to be "men for others".[11] What prevents the world from being wholly secular, then, is the practical love and piety which men show to each other in the course of daily events.

This explanation goes some way towards the formulation of a cogent theory of God's immanence in the world. Yet Bonhoeffer's view lacks something which Tillich's view preserves. Even if Christ is present in the world through the works and thoughts of men, we still need

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[11] Bonhoeffer often calls Christ "the man for others" because of the sacrificial nature of Christ's ministry and passion.

to explain how God is present ontologically within the universe. It is not enough to say how God, through Christ, has become present existentially within the hearts and minds of men. Tillich's doctrine of being-itself is more complete in this respect, for it provides a theory for the understanding of the ontological immanence of God. One may, though, still uphold the idea that Tillich's "secularity" is too God-filled, too theonomous. However, Tillich has provided Christianity with a model from which to work - a model which serves to unite the sacred and secular realms. Tillich's theology of immanence has been important in this respect and religious secularists may come to draw more and more on Tillich, to complement Bonhoeffer's conception of divine immanence, which has weaknesses, as is shown above.

But must religious secularism necessarily embrace a theology of immanence? Scholars such as J-M González-Ruiz and J.B. Metz feel that the autonomy of man is best preserved when God is transcendent, and a distinct dualism exists between God and the world. Man then can "cultivate his own garden", be independent within his own sphere. González-Ruiz says, "The biblical God is a 'thief-God' whose presence cannot be taken into account in the daily run of domestic economy." [In Taylor, p 193, 1968] That is, God enters the world of human affairs sporadically and unpredictably but "there is nothing in the intrinsic mechanism of the cosmos or the course of history that needs God as the immanent explanation of being or becoming". [ibid, p 192] To emphasise the "otherness" of God, González-Ruiz even describes the actions of God in the world as "gratuitous". [ibid]

Alfons Auer, drawing on observations made by Metz, points out that Christianity was presented to the ancients in opposition to pantheism. The beginning of secularisation is the removal of God from the world:

> The pantheism of the ancients never allowed the world to become entirely worldly, because it never let God become entirely divine. It was lacking the notion of a transcendent creator; the divine seemed to be an element of the world. A Christianity which rightly understands itself must appear "not as increasing divinization but precisely as a mounting removal of divinity from the world, and in this sense as a profanation of the world". To the pagans of old, the Christians were the real "atheists". [In Taylor, p 53, 1968]

This stress on God's transcendence, in opposition to pantheism, is not anathema to Tillich for, as we have seen, Tillich retains a strong sense of God's transcendence. God transcends the world through freedom. [ST II, p 9, 1957] But on the other hand, Tillich's balancing emphasis on God's immanence preserves something crucial for religious secularity. By uniting the sacred and secular realms, the theology of immanence allows daily activities to take on a devotional aspect. The world itself is affirmed as a fitting place for reverential devotion through secular labour precisely because God is present within it. Daily events point beyond themselves, and thus have greater significance. In the other (transcendental) model, daily activities have value only in terms of a much smaller sphere of reference, and the secular realm can no longer be considered religious in any sense other than that God created it and sometimes intervenes in its workings.

Of course, those theologians who insist on God's transcendence are contributing something important to the debate. Without the element of the sacred, the secular world has no notion of divinity.

"Is it not true," asks W.R. Comstock, "that the secular mandate must also be a profane burden to the religious heart that still aspires toward the holy centre of existence?" [In Murchland, p 259, 1967] Tillich is certainly correct in not postulating such a fusion of the secular and the divine realms that the difference between the sacred and secular is no longer discernable. The two realms cannot fuse completely since this would imply pantheism. As we have seen, Christianity must always insist on the separation of creator and creation. Thus Tillich's statement that the sacred and the secular realms "seem to exclude each other". [See page 133] However, because of the created world's correlative orientation towards its divine ground, a sense of God's immanence at the "depth" of life is present.

Now the proper position of religious secularism must be determined by a union of the above insights. González-Ruiz and Metz's claim for old-style transcendence must be rejected since the old dualism between sacred and profane realms reappears. Thus God's immanence must be insisted upon. However, that immanence must not be pressed in such a way that God becomes all-pervading Spirit (as in the pantheistic conception) or, in similar fashion, dies and literally pours himself into the universe (the theory of Altizer and Hamilton). God must be understood as being present in the world, though qualitatively distinct from it.

If God is immanently present within the world, then we have to agree that Tillich is right that God's presence may be discernable in certain situations. It can further be st that he is the depth of all life in the sense of being the creator and sustainer of the world (but not in the sense of being part of the material world).

However, Tillich's views must be tempered by the view that the presence of God is not strongly felt by many, and many others may never experience it unambiguously. The explanation for this must be that, though immanent within the world, God does not allow his presence to "break through" into the consciousness of men in dramatic and overwhelming ways, for the sake of man's autonomous self-development. God wants man to be free of his tutelage as far as possible. But grace is always available at the "depths" of life-those times when the courage to continue life deserts one and one needs to gain solace and regeneration from him who is the power of being. One need not repair to church to "drum up " such inspired energy. Rather, one would immerse oneself in one's daily activities with conviction and perseverance, for then grace could be encountered as one strove to do one's best, even though one were in the depths of despair. For if God loves the world, he will reward those who, however imperfectly, strive to improve it.

Many see today's industrial world as destructive and alienating, but it is the world we have structured, and we must make our home within it. This is the message of Harvey Cox, one of the radical theologians influenced by Tillich, in his book The Secular City. "The rise of urban civilisation and the collapse of traditional religion," says Cox, "are the two main hallmarks of our era and are closely related movements." [Cox, TSC, p 1, 1965] Thus urbanisation implies secularisation which is "the loosing of the world from religious and quasi-religious understandings of itself, the dispelling of all closed worldviews, the breaking of all supernatural myths and sacred symbols". [ibid, pp 1-2] This is a strong statement on behalf of the idea of man's autonomy (and such statements counter-balance Tillich's theonomous position), but Cox

remains Tillich's disciple in the end. He leaves room for transcendent experiences which are "those aspects of our experience which can never be transmuted into extensions of ourselves". [ibid, p 229] Cox is saying that God can be found at the depth of being. Encountering God may not be a daily concern or even a frequent concern, but we can recognise him as he who can be met "at those places in life where we come up against that which is not pliable and disposable, at those hard edges where we are both stopped and challenged to move ahead." [ibid] It is Tillich's "depth experience" that Cox is referring to here.

In Cox's "technopolis" a practical ethic is to be preferred to accounts of the supernatural. And, indeed, religious secularity should make much of Bonhoeffer's idea that God is present in the world through the deeds of those imitating Christ. Practical and straightforward morality has a definite place in the Secular City whereas supernatural and mythical accounts may not have. Tillich, who called Christ the New Being, and who saw Christ's mission as the expression of God's will in history, would find that such a concept of immanence says something important about the power of Christ to inspire men. Bonhoeffer certainly succeeds in translating the immanent principle in a non-supernatural way. However, Bonhoeffer's concept of God's immanence needs to be complemented by Tillich's so as to establish God's ontological relation to the world.

All in all, it is clear that Paul Tillich has made a significant contribution to the debate on religious secularisation. In doing so he has proved himself to be a man of his age, and has certainly contributed towards reformulating theism in a way that broadens its

appeal to a sceptical and secular mankind. His concept of God as being-itself strongly asserts the immanence of God within the world and this paves the way for a non-dualistic view of the sacred and secular realms. His co-emphasis on God's transcendence, though, allows a place for the element of holiness in the apprehension of modern, secular man. By supporting religious secularism Tillich shows an appreciation for the Zeitgeist. He helps broaden theism's appeal by showing that modern religious philosophers earnestly seek to address themselves to the religious dynamics of their age. Tillich might not have inspired radical theologians in the way he wished to, but his vast influence over the school of radical theology proves that he is seen as a daring and innovative thinker. Undoubtedly radical theology has produced new interest in religious affairs and has presented new perspective to the spiritually estranged. Radical thinking certainly is necessary in our age of disillusionment. Paul Tillich must be given credit for fostering radical religious thought in our time.

3.6. Paul Tillich and the encounter with world religions

On what basis could Tillich broaden the appeal of theism by entering into dialogue with other world religions? One answer could be that he could broaden the community of Christian believers by converting those of other faiths to Christianity. But Tillich did not set out to do this and, indeed, the spirit of the age is against such proselytising. It is coming to be recognised more and more within Christianity that all religions have borne and still bear the revelation of divinity: "It seems clear that we are being called today to attain a global religious vision which is aware of the unity of all mankind before God and which at the same time makes sense of

the diversity of God's way within the various streams of human life." [Hick, MGI, p 180, 1977] Tillich is quite happy to agree with this view. He writes:

> Revelatory experiences are universally human. Religions are based on something that is given to a man wherever he lives. He is given a revelation which always implies saving powers... There are revealing and saving powers in all religions. [Tillich, SHRST, p 81, 1966]

Such an open attitude already gains some prestige for theism. The Christian church has a long history of ardent "missionising" behind it, a history tarnished by the impression of a culture relentlessly seeking to impose its views and customs on "inferior heathens". The cultural arrogance of the West found unhappy expression in its attempt to convert the rest of the world. Such strong particularism has been expressed by Karl Barth, whose view it is that Christianity is not a religion as such, since it is the revealed truth of God. Other faiths are "religions" because they represent attempts by man to reach God. [Tillich, CEWR, pp 44-45, 1963] The view today is that such a position is unnecessarily exclusivistic. It is held that, even if there are particularistic elements that one wants to uphold in one's own religion, that does not prevent one from finding elements within one's tradition which can be linked to elements in other religions.

This perspective is brought about, not only by an appreciation of cultural relativity, but also by an appreciation of God's infinity. No religious structure is capable of capturing the depths of divinity. An infinite God carries infinite possibilities within himself and so it is quite fair to assume that each religion's different perspective may convey an important part of God's nature

to us. Tillich readily accepts this principle since his doctrine of God as being-itself is a doctrine which stresses divine infinity. Tillich's God is not a being in a set realm, but is the immanent Lord of Creation.

However, respect for other religions does not prevent one from claiming primacy for one's own. Tillich shows a commitment to the belief that the Christian revelation has a status of primacy. This primacy is understood in terms of the idea of the universal significance of Christianity. Tillich develops this idea via the doctrine of the Logos, as it pertains to Christ:

> Although the Fourth Gospel speaks more clearly than the others of the uniqueness of Christ, it interprets him at the same time in the light of the most universal of all concepts used in this period, the concept of the logos, the universal principle of the divine self-manifestation, thus freeing the interpretation of Jesus from a particularism through which he would become the property of a particular religious group. [Tillich, CEWR, pp 32-33, 1963]

So Tillich, as a Christian, claims a primacy for Christianity on the basis of the manifestation of Christ as the New Being in history. We have seen how Tillich has interpreted the concept of the divine logos within the framework of the idea of being-itself [see page 34] and so we can understand what Tillich means when he says, "The logos is present everywhere, like the seed on the land". [CEWR, p 34] It is God's immanence that is being stressed. Tillich goes on, though, to argue that this universal principle became radically immanent within the affairs of men through "the central appearance of the logos in a historical person, the Christ". [ibid] According to Christian dogma, Christ's appearance has been the only appearance of divinity under the conditions of existence.

But the fact that this revelation was a special one should not tempt Christians of today to adhere to a religious exclusivism. Tillich insists that early Christianity rejected exclusivism in favour of the idea that Christian truth incorporates the truths of all the other religions. This led to the idea that "all that is true anywhere in the world belongs to us, the Christians". [ibid, p 35] So other revelations are manifestations of the divine Logos, but each must ultimately be judged in terms of the revelation of Christ. One should approach other revelations through the insights gained from Christianity. This is Tillich's implied position throughout Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions. When Christianity ceases to make its universalistic claim, Christian universalism is transformed into "humanist relativism". [ibid, p 42]

Now it is all very well pointing out hat Christianity is prepared to "share" its special revelation with the rest of the world, but of course the rest of the world may not want to appropriate that revelation for its own use. Further, other religions certainly do not like being told that their revelations are but pale reflections of God's most clear and efficacious revelation. But then again, there is nothing wrong with a religion claiming primacy for itself, particularly if that religion shows respect for other religions. Tillich is certainly not to be condemned for believing that Christ was the "New Being", who inaugurated God's new covenant with man. He is entitled to that view. To be sure, Tillich is claiming a preponderance of truth for Christianity, but this position is mollified by his view that all religions are ultimately means and not ends. They are not receptacles for ultimate truth; they point beyond themselves towards ultimate truth: "In the depth of every

living religion there is a point at which the religion loses its importance, and that to which it points breaks through its particularity..." [Tillich, CEWR, p 97, 1963] Even if it is held that Christianity is the most important "means" by which to approach the ultimate, the above attitude allows for important contributions from other religions. Dialogue can still take place.

Now Tillich's concept of being-itself is a useful one by which to forge inter-religious links, as will be shown, but his doctrine that Christ is the New Being is not one that is likely to find sympathisers within other religious traditions. As Clifford Green points out, the Tillichian dialogue with other religions must revolve around the concept of being-itself. [In Johnson, p 420, 1973] Almost all religions have an idea of an absolute, or something ultimate, and the concept of being-itself may be one which can draw different religious strands together. The advantage of that will be discussed presently.

In the meantime it must be stated that the doctrine that Christ is the "New Being" is a doctrine which will be a stumbling block to non-theists. The doctrine of Christ's incarnation centres in events which are said to have taken place at a specific time in a particular place. To affirm dogmatically the divinity of Christ is to take up a particularistic position, even if not an exclusivistic one. And, as Hick points out, it is such particularistic claims which ensure that religions remain well apart from each other. [Hick PR, pp 121-122, 1973] Tillich knows this and does not use incarnation doctrine as a starting point of inter-religious debate. What can be briefly considered is whether Tillich should back down on such particularistic claims and whether

his doctrines of "being-itself" and "the New Being" sit comfortably together.

As to the first question, it has already been stated that Tillich has every right to affirm Christianity's view of Christ as standing in a special and unique relationship to God. Such an affirmation can only impede dialogue if the professed aim of dialogue is the establishment of a religious syncretism. Tillich believes that dialogue should not take place with such an aim in view. The point is not to draw different religious traditions together into a hybridised union, but rather to allow each separate tradition to draw inspiration from insights within other traditions. The idea is that existing concepts will take on a freshness and a power which they did not previously possess. [Tillich, CEWR, pp 55-56, 1963; Green in Johnson, p 420, 1973] No religion is required to concede anything. Dialogue on this basis is fruitful according to Tillich and the group of Japanese Buddhists with whom he held protracted conversations. [Tillich, DCOF, p 178, 1965] Despite the fact that Tillich holds to the primacy of Christianity, he believes that religious dialogue is dialectical in nature [CEWR, p 51]; something new and valuable invariably emerges.

Assuming that Tillich's debate begins with the idea of being-itself, will he later be able to convince non-theists that the doctrine of the New Being is a logical extension thereof? The answer to this is probably no. The concept of being-itself implies omnipresent energising power, which notion eastern religions could find accessible to some degree. But to say that that particular power was manifestedin a particular individual is to make a very exclusive claim about an historical personage. Yet even the doc-

trine of incarnation, which Tillich upholds, is accessible to Bhakti Hinduism; the Ramayana and the Mahabharata uphold the idea that God may have human incarnations, which are called avatars It is so, then, that through this doctrine Tillich could make a case for Christ's incarnation. But his claim that Christ is the power of being "in the flesh" would be opposed from the other side by the claim that there have been nine incarnations and Christ has not been one of them. Rather, he was a messenger of God's word, and his theology is more important than his personage. [Shinn in Gelberg, p 77, 1983]

At such a point dialogue would have a good chance of reaching a stalemate situation, for there would be clash of truth claims based on different scriptural assertions. Hinduism ascribes relatively minor status to Jesus: Christianity treats the avatara stories with scepticism. Both Hindus and Christians are prepared to accept the incarnation principle; both are dogmatic about historical instances of incarnation. Incarnational claims are particularistic claims; for dialogue to be effective, it is to more abstract concepts that we need to turn. In particular, of course, it is the concept of being-itself which must be examined, so as to determine whether it is translatable across the great East-West divide.

If Tillich's concept of God did forge links between East and West, what would be the significance of such a cross-cultural understanding? How would theism be enhanced? And would it be transformed?

There are those who fear that inter-religious dialogue necessarily involves both participating parties making concessions. But this

could only happen if the stated aim of the dialogue was to construct an intermediary position (in this context, a syncretistic religion). Tillich rejects such a basis for discussion [DCOF, p. 178] The whole aim of inter-religious debate is to "lead each religion to explore its own depths" [Green in Johnson, p 426, 1973]; each religion gains a new appreciation of its own concepts.

It is probably fair to argue that religious syncretism would result in a belief system devoid of the power which a primitive mythos gives to a religion. Syncretism would demand the surrender of deep-rooted and powerful cultural myths and legends. Such myths have powerful psychological effects on a society. Jung regarded them as cultural archetypes; they cannot simply be surrendered. By creating a sycretistic religion one ends up with a creation straining to incorporace separate elements while, at the same time, being weakened by the exclusion of powerful but contending elements. The ideal situation arising out of dialogue is that all religions co-existentially grow stronger. This can happen if religions realise that they need not contend against each other, but could work together to promote a reverent and positive response, amongst men, towards the infinite power of being in the universe.

This is to suggest that religions may be pointing to the same infinite reality, albeit in different ways: "The different encounters with the transcendent within the different religious traditions may all be encounters with the one infinite reality..." [Hick, GUF, p 139, 1973] If we are to admit, as Tillich does, [see p 144] that religions are ways to God, then we can appreciate that different religions present a spectrum of possible approaches to God, all of which ways will find devotees of different sensibility.

But the appeal and prestige of each separate route may well come to depend on the appeal and prestige of the religious endeavour as a whole. And if it can be shown that all religions point towards the same goal, then a sense of brotherhood between religions could arise. Religion as a whole is promoted if it can be shown that all religions have a common Ultimate Concern.

In this instance only the concept of being-itself will be examined as a uniting force. If Tillich's concept of God can force links between religions, and particularly between East and West, then all religions will benefit. For all religions, the God-concept will be elucidated. Further, a sense of union and common purpose may well arise between religions. To the extent that Tillich succeeds, theism gains prestige in that one of its formulators has initiated meaningful dialogue.

3.7. Being-itself as an ecumenical concept

According to Macquarrie's typological system, Christianity is the religion ideally suited to the task of drawing the various world religions together because Christianity balances the elements of God's immanence and transcendence. [Macquarrie, PCT, pp 165-170] Hinduism and Buddhism are included under Macquarrie's series of "immanent" religions, while Judaism and Islam are placed in the "transcendent" column. [ibid, p 167] Traditionalists would include Christianity in the list of religions stressing God's immanence and transcendence.

The concept of being-itself enables theism to approach eastern conceptions of the ultimate with fewer misgivings than before. If being-itself is immanent within the world, then perhaps the theistic God-concept can be related to the Hindu concept of Brahman, the God-concept of the Upanishadic tradition. However Tillich cannot embrace the Hindu God-concept because of its idealism. Sen explains the Upanishadic doctrine as follows:

> The Upanishads point out that the Brahman and the Atman are the same. The Supreme has manifested Himself in every soul, and the student of religion is dramatically told in the Upanishads, "Thou art That" (Tat tvam asi)...This is a monistic doctrine which denies the existence of the world as separate from God. [Sen, p 19, 1978]

Now Tillich, as we have seen, sympathises with the view that God and the world cannot ultimately be separated. His doctrine of being-itself holds that God is present within the world as its creative and sustaining power. Hence there can be no real separation of the sacred and secular realms. The sacred is able to break through into the world of secularity and when this happens God may be experienced. [ST, pp 241-242] But, as has been clearly shown, Tillich cannot adopt a monistic position and remain a theist. To say that the human soul is part of the all-embracing divine soul, is to say that there is a part of man which is intrinsically divine. In other words, in Platonic fashion, man is held to possess an imperishable, indivisible immortal soul. In contrast to this stands the Christian concept of resurrection; this doctrine eschews the idea that the soul is naturally immortal, holding that only through divine grace and power can man be "re-created beyond death in terms of a new bodily existence". [Stewart, p 302, 1980] So, in the Christian view, a man can be re-constituted after death only through divine grace; there is nothing intrinsically divine in man.

Tillich follows the traditional Christian view that creator and creature are separate. So Tillich is able to sympathise with the Hindu view that God is intimately present within the world; he cannot go along with the way Hinduism explains that presence. Both Tillich and the Hindu, though, are equally convinced that the idea of God as a being in a distant galactic kingdom, is an unacceptable notion.

It was with Buddhists that Tillich chiefly debated and he has this to say about the dialogical strength of his concept of God in that situation:

> The ipsum esse, being-itself, of the classical Christian doctrine of God, is a transpersonal category and enables the Christian disputant to understand the meaning of absolute nothingness in Buddhist thought. The term points to the unconditional and infinite character of the Ultimate and the impossibility of identifying it with anything particular that exists. [Tillich, CEWR, p 67, 1963]

In the sense that the concept of being-itself points beyond the anthropomorphic idea of a transcendent being, it emphasises God's infinity - the ungraspable nature of his being. As Tillich implies, the Buddhist concept of absolute nothingness does not imply the absence of God, but the absence of an adequate way of describing him. The fact that the Buddha would not be drawn into debate on metaphysical concepts such as God or Nirvana, does not mean that he negated their reality. [Smith, pp 124-126, 1965] Buddhism, particularly Zen Buddhism, considers it good sense to say nothing about concepts which defy attempts at elaboration. Debate, then, leads Christianity and Buddhism to concur that God is infinite and cannot be satisfactorily described in terms known to us.

With respect to God's infinity and his omnipresence Christianity and Taoism (which has influenced Buddhism greatly) are in close agreement. Houston Smith uses familiar Tillichian terminology when he defines the Tao: "Ineffable and transcendent, this ultimate Tao is the ground of all existence. It is behind all and beneath all, the womb from which all life springs and to which it again returns." [Smith, p 199] This description sounds like a description of being-itself, that power which is at the depth of life - its creative and sustaining energy. One can push points of similarity with Tillich's concept of God even further: "Though Tao ultimately is transcendent, it is also immanent. In this secondary sense it is the way of the universe; the norm, the rhythm, the driving power in all nature, the ordering principle behind all life." [ibid]

So far, so good, but when Smith takes his description further, we notice that the doctrine of the Tao is another doctrine of idealism. The Tao does not just stand at the "depth" of existence, but infuses and informs material objects: the Tao is "behind, but likewise in the midst of, for when Tao enters this second form it 'assumes flesh' and informs all things. It 'adapts its vivid essence, its manifold fullness, subdues its resplendent lustre, and assumes the likeness of dust.'[12] Basically spirit rather than matter it cannot be exhausted." [ibid] Again, then, we see that there exists a strong emotional bond between Tillich's concept of being-itself and an eastern concept of divinity (this time the concept of the Tao). Both concepts strongly express the presence of God in the world,

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[12] Smith is quoting from the Tao Te Ching.

but theism will not go as far as permitting being-itself to inhabit material objects.

Where Tillich's theism meets the East successfully is at the point of religious verification. Tillich's theology is a theology of experience based on the belief that God is immanent within the world. It has been argued that, to some extent, the awareness of the God of whom Tillich speaks is a mystical awareness. [See footnote on page 36] At this point Tillich is close to eastern thought, which abjures the role of reason in the attainment of religious knowledge. The oriental mind generally perceives the present world to be ephemeral and illusory and the Oriental's faith is based on inner experience, not on natural theology which argues from manifestations perceived in the world of nature.[13] Emphasis is placed on that portion of "the nature of things which can be known only by being experienced". [Titus, p 324, 1959] To be sure, there is a strong philosophical tradition in the East, but knowledge of God comes through experience, not speculation. Explaining Zen Buddhism, Humphreys writes, "...there must be an intellect to be transcended, for it is when the intellect pauses, baffled and at bay, that Zen begins." [Humphreys, p 183, 1978]

This latter point brings to mind Kierkegaard's view that reason could never "conceive an absolute unlikeness". [Kierkegaard, PF, p 35, 1962] That is, reason will always fall short of demonstrating the truth of Christian claims and, anyway, it is always cold and

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[13] The best example of natural theology is the Five Ways-argument for the existence of God produced by Aquinas, in which it is argued that God is a necessary being because of the need of a first cause to explain causal series perceived in nature.

dispassionate. The happiness of the individual is what matters. [Kierkegaard, CUP, p 360, 1941]

When man reaches the point beyond which his reason cannot take him, he should - according to Kierkegaard - take a "leap" of faith to satisfy his passionate desire for belief. [Kierkegaard, PF, p 34, 1962] This action is justified, being born of a subjective need to embrace God while one is subject to the despair of meaninglessness and uncertainty. Tillich would rather not talk of a "leap" of faith since such a "leap" implies an arbitrariness. [CTB, p 170] For Tillich, faith is justified on the grounds that God approaches us and reveals himself to us. Tillich believes that there is a reality, a presence which answers man when he turns in despair to ask life's most fundamental question - the question of being. [See ST I, pp 24 & 72]

So then, both Kierkegaard and Tillich agree with the eastern view that the unaided intellect is incapable of attaining the truths of religion which the inquirer seeks. Kierkegaard argued that rational proofs presupposed the very answer they sought to demonstrate [Thomas, p 307]; Tillich argued that the God of Aquinas's proofs was an object amongst other objects in the universe. [Tillich, HCT, p 195, 1968] Both men look to inner experience for verification of religious faith. Kierkegaard's faith, though, is too much the product of an act of will [Thomas, p 321]; Tillich's notion of faith is more cogent since it is based on his doctrine of correlation, which is given power through Tillich's emphasis on God's immanence. For if God is present within the world as Spirit, he may be encountered when man's relentless questioning brings him to the boundary between the finite and infinite realms. The anxiety

of finitude may bring man into contact with the power of being which affirms his worth because it is self affirming. [Tillich, CTB, p 167, 1979]

However, this is not tantamount to saying that man's experience of God is God's experience of himself. This Spinozan concept implies that man is part of the divine. However, because that "identity" is defined in terms of "substance" or "indwelling Spirit", it is unacceptable to Tillich and western theists. The "tat tvam asi" doctrine of Hinduism, in which the Atman is seen as part of the divine Brahman, is unacceptable to theism because it violates the concepts of freedom and autonomy with respect to man. Creation "in the image of God" (Gen 1:26) implies correlation, not identity in the western mind. However, Tillich's theology of experience does draw East and West closer together on the basis of a common rejection of the sovereignty of reason in man's quest for religious truth.[14] The potential exists for dialogue between East and West on the basis of common religious experience. Mystics from both camps may lead the way in such discussions.

It will be remembered that Tillich points to the "transpersonal" aspect of being-itself as being helpful in his conversations with Buddhists. [See pp 153-154] We have seen that Tillich agrees with the mainstream of eastern thought that God's infinity must never be compromised. If God were a person, he would be bound by the

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[14] It must, of course, be remembered that in Tillich's concept of ecstatic faith, reason plays a role. The universe has a "logos structure" and man's reason comes into play in the recognition of the intrinsic "rationality" of the universe. [ST I, p 190, 1955]

categories of finitude. [See pp 48-49] However, God is "not less than personal" [ST I, p 271], that is, he is able to respond to man at the level of personality. Yet Tillich tells us that God transcends the personal category infinitely [ST I, pp 270-271] There is infinitely more to the divine than the aspect of his being that we encounter at the level of personal experience. The idea that God is transpersonal (rather than impersonal)[15] is in line with the general eastern view on the matter.

Yet, within the Vedas, the all-pervading Brahman is conceived of as consisting of many parts. [Sen, p 48, 1978] The transpersonal Brahman is seen as being able to express itself at the level of personality, through its ability to project aspects and forms of itself. Here Tillich is close to Hinduism, for both agree that God infinitely transcends the personal category but can be said to operate at our level of apperception. Hindus, like Tillich, insist that our predicates for God "cannot claim to describe Him literally... for the meanings they carry for us are radically unlike the

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[15] Impersonality implies a lack of feeling or concern within the divine consciousness. The eastern religions do not say that the ultimate principle is devoid of concern for the world, nor do they say that that loving concern is beyond our experience. But God (if the ultimate principle may be so called) is not a person, for the concept of personality implies finitude. To the extent that it sees the Ultimate as having a personal aspect without being a person, the East is at one with Tillich. Yet at times the eastern attitude seems unnecessarily cynical: "Whatever Reality may be, it is beyond the conception of the finite intellect; it follows that attempts at description are misleading, unprofitable, and waste of time." [Humphreys, p 79, 1978; on the attitude of Theravada Buddhism to speculation about the nature of God.] Such an attitude implies the belief that the underlying principle of the karmic universe is, with respect to our experience thereof, impersonal and unknowable. This position, though, is a radical one within the eastern spectrum. The warmth and concern of "being" is well known in the East.

senses in which they apply to God". [Smith, p 72, 1958] God is "infinite being, infinite consciousness, infinite bliss" [ibid] and so attempts to describe him will always be severely limited. Those people who wish to think of God in terms of something "concrete and representational" must leave aside abstract thinking and imagine God as "the noblest reality they actually encounter in this natural world. This is the symbol "supreme person". [ibid, p 73]

Thus, Tillich is in agreement with the Hindu position that holds that personhood is a symbol for God. In theism it represents that part of God which meets us at the point of loving concern and reciprocal affirmation. With the advent of Christ, the New Being, it was shown that being-itself could be encountered under the conditions of existence, within the life of a person. [ST II, p 136] From the eastern perspective, God's "personality" may be encountered within the different forms of his activity: he is Creator (Brahma), Preserver (Vishnu) and Destroyer (Shiva). Beside these three gods Hinduism has a proliferation of minor deities, associated largely with natural forces e.g. Rita is the god of cosmic order, while Varuna is the administrator of the law of cosmic order. The transpersonality of Brahman is rendered less formidable through this deification of forces in the universe. The introduction of personal gods makes Hinduism seem more endearing and accessible. Along with theism, it has recognised that divinity must be seen as working at the level of inter-personal encounter if religion is to have relevance and appeal. With respect to this issue, Tillich's theism and Hinduism have the same outlook.

Even within Buddhism there have been movements away from the Buddha's non-communicative attitude about ultimate reality.

Theravada Buddhism's austerity and reticence with respect to metaphysical speculation, has been counter-balanced in Mahayana Buddhism. Within the Mahayanan school of thought, smaller schools of Buddhism have arisen which have delighted in metaphysical speculation about heavens, hells and the nature of nirvana. [Smith, p 138] Within Pure Land Buddhism, the Bodhisattva Amitabha was elevated to the status of personal saviour; other Mahayanan schools have deified Siddharta Gautama (the Buddha)and he is described as the "Lord Who Looks Down in Pity". [ibid] Again, the emphasis is on the desire for an aspect of personality within the category of being. Tillich recognises the need for such an element in man's experience while at the same time insisting that God be held to transcend the personal category infinitely. [ST I, pp 270-271]

If anything, Buddhism stresses this transcendent aspect too much; even the Mahayanan schools seem reluctant to talk of ultimate reality in terms of God. Nevertheless, they exhibit a need for conceiving that ultimate reality in terms of warmth and concern (hence their emphasis on salvation by the grace of Buddha; compassion of man and the Buddha; petitionary prayer). With its dual emphasis on the ineffability of the ultimate, and its accessibility via the mediation of the Buddha (as mediator of the divine will), Buddhism is seen to be close to Tillich's position concerning the "personality" of being-itself.

It can, then, be seen that Tillich's concept of being-itself establishes interesting points of dialogue with the various eastern faiths. The main difference between Tillich and the Orientals with respect to the God-concept lies in the eastern insistence on an idealistic monism. That Tillich cannot accept. Nevertheless, the

idea of the immanence of God allows both dialogical partners to accept the importance of emphasising experience, rather than reason, in verifying the existence of God. Furthermore, both participants have sufficient conviction about the importance of God's transcendence, to stress that God cannot be subsumed within the category of personhood.[16] There are other points that could have been added. The discussion between Tillich and the East has the potential for a wide examination. The above points, though, show that there are general points of agreement. This suggests that both East and West may be straining towards a common reality. The more this is seen to be so, it could be argued, the more both sides gain in prestige.

As far as the main difference between East and West concerning the God-concept is concerned, the insights of pneumatology may take us some way towards overcoming it. If the Spirit of God may be said to "come upon" certain people at certain times [See pages 37-38], then some identity between God and man has been forged. Yet that occurrence is a special dispensation and not a permanent condition, as in eastern thought. The western view remains the one that differentiates between creator and creatures. The doctrines of correlation and identity may be mutually sympathetic, but they are far from being the same. They are close enough, though, for us to see that it is possible for East and West to affirm strongly that the

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16 Ironically enough, eastern philosophy shows a transcendent element here which traditional theism lacks. For if God is a being, then he would be a person, with defining characteristics. The traditional model, as we have seen, does not do justice to the idea that God is infinite.

divine principle is undoubtedly immanent within the world and can be experienced by man.

To what extent does Tillich appeal to Islam and Judaism, religions traditionally categorised as being "religions of transcendence"? Since Judaism, Christianity and Islam are closely related monotheisms which arose in the Near East, their concepts of God will obviously be similar in many respects. Does Tillich's theism disturb that similarity? Very briefly, the answer must be that Tillich's thought does present the strong transcendent strand of thought in monotheism. The notion of God as creator is affirmed by Tillich and this idea is crucial in Judaism and Islam. "In the Islamic conception," writes Smith, "the world did not emerge, as the Hindus would have it, by some process of unconscious emanation from the divine. It was created by a deliberate act of God's will." [Smith, p 232] Islam, Judaism and Christianity are firm in their insistence on the "wholly otherness" of God, his absolute distinction from his creation.

This distinctiveness is preserved in imagery which focuses predominantly on God's majesty, his might, his overlordship, his sovereignty. As we have seen, Tillich recognises the importance of such symbolisation of God. It protects the abysmal element in the characterisation of the divine. But both Judaism and Islam uphold the logos element in God's nature, too, for both recognise the intelligible structure of nature. God created it and stamped his mark upon it (e.g. Gen. 1:31) and we are able to appreciate its ordered nature and apprehend God's divine intelligence through our perception of the work of his hands.

What Tillich has to do in order to bring Islam and Judaism closer to himself, and to the East, is to convince the other two great monotheisms that God's sphere is the earth and not a transcendent realm above its surface. Both Islam and Judaism stress God's love for mankind, and this love must be developed to imply God's closeness to and acceptance of the ways of the earth. Which is to say that the symbol of judgement must be modified to one of patient tutelage.[17] It must be stressed that God's loving presence can be discerned at the heart of the affairs of men, and within the stirrings of a vast and awe-inspiring nature.

This latter emphasis is dear to Rubenstein's heart. He recognises that Judaism has emphasised the concept of the Sky-Father at the expense of more maternal imagery which he discerns is at the root of Tillich's concept of being-itself:

> Tillich used the terms "Being-itself", "Ground of Being" and "Source of Being" to designate the God he did affirm. These terms suggest a feminine, maternal imagery which contrasted with the decidedly masculine character of the God of biblical theism he rejected. [Rubenstein, PS, p 162, 1974]

Here Rubenstein points to something important, although he does so in a way which distorts Tillich's position. To suggest that Tillich has rejected the God of biblical theism is baldly false, as has been amply demonstrated. We have also seen that Rubenstein mistakenly sees Tillich's theology as a form of idealism. [See page 43] Yet

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17 Some religious secularists would say that even this idea must give way to the notion of autonomy for man. As we have seen, though, Tillich believes that man's autonomy must never be longed for at the expense of man's participation in the ultimate.

Rubenstein is quite correct to point out that Tillich's language steers us away from celestial preoccupations towards a new reverence for the earth. This Tillich has in common with the East: divinity may be apprehended right here amongst the ordinary concerns of men and the workings of nature.[18] Tillich's theology affirms the intrinsic worth of the temporal realm. This affirmation of the worth of secular life may be profitably considered by those ethical monotheisms which emphasise that divinity is trans-worldly. Tillich reminds all religions that the earth is as much the territory of the divine as any reality anywhere else. At this essential point, East and West can meet, even if they are unreconciled concerning the way that the divine is present within the world.

3.8. A broader theism

Paul Tillich certainly enhances the cause of biblical theism through his willingness to attempt to make contact with contrary religious views. He has shown modern biblical theism to be progressive in its thinking and aware of the thinking of those outside its ambit of belief. Further, Tillich displays the endearing trend of non-exclusivity which has recently gained ground within Christian thinking.

It has been argued that, although Tillich presents an interesting and novel challenge to atheists, his approach to them rests on an

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[18] Because the western monotheisms lay so much stress on the workings of God in history, it is surprising that they do not place greater emphasis on the idea of God's immanence in man's affairs. Further, they must extend the concept of immanence to imply God's closeness to his natural creation.

appeal to an experience which they deny having had. This is to speak generally, of course. There are, no doubt, some religious searchers who have found Tillich's writings about experiencing the Ultimate at the depth of life's concerns, convincing. The general feeling amongst those who have addressed Tillich on this issue has been that Tillich's appeal rests on certain presuppositions of faith, and no amount of persuasive rhetoric can bring such faith to the fore in the consciousness of the unbeliever. However, Tillich has led atheists to reconsider their position with respect to the most telling questions that a man can ask himself. Even if the atheist denies a divine presence at the depth of being, he must acknowledge that life has a profundity beneath the level of daily concerns, and that man must be able to formulate answers satisfying to himself, in response to questions arising from that profound depth of ultimate concern.

With respect to his influence on radical theologians, it must be made absolutely clear that Tillich had reservations about the way his ideas were appropriated. He fully intended to open up theism to new interpretational possibilities, but he did not encourage the rise of the Death of God school of theology. However, it is interesting to note that even his most radical disciples do not entirely discount the possibility of God's existence and the possibility of a future theonomous age. They have learned from Tillich the "faith in spite of doubt" which is so central to his theology. Again, despite the fact that we live in an age of radical doubt, Tillich's immanentist theology teaches that God may be found by those who diligently seek him.

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Tillich's stress on God's immanence is important for religious secularity. Tillich reminds religious secularists that if there is not to be an absolute separation of the sacred and the profane realms, then God must be thought of as being discernably immanent within the world. Thus, the notion of man's autonomy (which, it seems, must be respected to a large degree in this age) must be tempered by the view that God's presence may still break through dramatically into the temporal world.

Finally, Tillich has succeeded in drawing different religions closer together via his doctrine of God as being-itself. In so doing he makes theism more viable for those who need a faith which is not too sectarian or particularistic. At the same time, he opens up the possibility for theists to explore other religious traditions through insights gained within their own tradition. Tillich, ultimately, helps to establish the prestige of the religious enterprise as a whole by showing that religions do have a wide common cause, which is to point the way to the Infinite - that which is the source and preserver of all life. The presence of the Infinite may be experienced right here amongst the products of its divine creativity. The Infinite power of the universe is not distant and detached, but is very present within this, the world of men.

On the basis of all that has been written in this chapter, one must conclude that Paul Tillich has broadened the appeal and accessibility of theism. He must be viewed as a theologian of the greatest consequence.

Chapter 4

CONCLUSION

Has Paul Tillich enhanced or transformed biblical theism? The question implies an antithesis between enhancement and transformation, which is correct, for transformation means a "change in the form of" and no theologian should suppose that he could change the form of theism, yet Tillich proposes to give theism an important change in emphasis (not in content). This emphasis is really a re-emphasis for, as has been shown, the doctrine of being-itself is a neglected but unquestionably entrenched part of Christian tradition. So Tillich does not transform biblical theism. He is a theologian full of respect for Christian traditions dating from antiquity to the present time.

It is more difficult to decide whether Tillich has enhanced theism. This writer is convinced that he has. His doctrine of God challenges a conception of God which is in serious need of re-examination: the idea that God is a being, an object or entity existing out in space. When Tillich writes, "The protest of atheism against such a higher person is correct", (Tillich, ST I, p 271, 1955) he is calling for a radical re-evaluation of the most central theistic concept of all. And he is right to do so. It is perhaps going too far when radical secularists say that man has "come of age" with respect to his understanding of the universe, but it is probably fair to say that he may now begin to cast off religious views and concepts which are obviously crudely primitive and anthropomorphic.

Tillich is important because he sees the need to re-interpret our concept of God. He describes this age as the age of doubt and meaninglessness (Tillich, CTB, p 168, 1979) and his theology is of a sufficiently radical nature to do justice to the radical questioning of our time. His talk of "faith despite doubt" and the idea of the "God above God" in The Courage to Be reveals that Tillich is concerned with the modern impetus for more bold and incisive commentaries on the nature of God. He has sought to meet modern questions about God. His intentions are of the best. Has he succeeded, though, in interpreting the nature of God for modern man?

It has been argued that Tillich's concept of God is unclear because ambiguous. His method of correlation points to an understanding of God which entails that a clear separation must exist between creator and creation. Yet, for terms like "being-itself" and "ground of being" to have full impact, they should be permitted an idealist interpretation. Because Tillich cannot permit this and remain a theist at the same time, his terms lack forcefulness and clarity.

Nevertheless, Tillich's concept of God could be reformulated successfully in terms of the idea of "surrounding Spirit". Such a reformulation would preserve Tillich's emphasis on God's immanence and form the basis for his theology of experience; this emphasis on experience for religious verification is an important factor contra the traditional cosmological theology. Tillich's explanation, in Dynamics of Faith, of how an immanentist theology gives rise to the ecstasy of faith, is one of the high points of modern theology. It is quite possible to retain this crucial element of

Tillich's thought (and, indeed, Tillich's whole immanentist stance) while amending his concept of God so as to exclude the possibility of [illegible]ieal ist interpretation.

And yet, paradoxically, Tillich's system would suffer from such alterations. As one steeped in a theology of "Gefühl" (see p 58) it is somehow appropriate that his theology is strong in poetical and emotional appeal. It is a subversive strength of Tillich's system that he strongly implies the permanent incorporation of the pneumatological principle into his theology. It can scarcely be denied that such a suggestion of idealism creates a strong poetic appeal for those who, like Rubinstein, feel the need for a renewed emphasis on the earth as man's sacred domain. The closer that God comes to be associated with the earth, the more easily can maternal imagery appertain.

So Tillich's concept of God suffers from this dilemma: much of its emotional force lies in the ambiguity of its terminology, but such ambiguity undercuts its philosophical appeal. Such a problem is perhaps inevitable in the work of one who is, besides being a theologian and a philosopher, something of a mystic and a poet. Yet it must be said that from within the density of three large volumes of systematic theology emerges a concept of God which is profound and which can appeal immensely to those able to excuse its imprecision at certain points. Tillich reaffirms the concept of Spirit and allows God back into the midst of man's earthly domain. His theology of immanence certainly enhances biblical theism.

With respect to whether Tillich has given theism a broader accessibility it has been argued that, in the main, he has. His concept

of God as being-itself brings theism yet more into line with what eastern philosophers are saying, thus creating a healthy climate for debate and mutual understanding between East and West. This, it has been argued, promotes the general cause of religion.

Tillich has certainly helped to broaden the base of theistic speculation by inspiring radical theologians to think widely and critically about the nature of God. He did not support the defection of some of his disciples from the ranks of the believers. However, it is largely owing to Tillich's influence that even the most radical of the radical theologians still retain a belief in the possibility of the "God-above-God" being rediscovered and worshipped in joy by a modern mankind. So Tillich has helped to inspire a broader-based and more radical scepticism about God (a scepticism which was gaining ground anyway) but helped to shape such inevitable radicalism in such a way that the final death of God has not been confidently pronounced even within radical circles. Theism is thus fortunate that the Death of God movement had its roots in Tillich; without his tutelage, the movement would have been far more radical and sceptical.

As far as Tillich's appeal to atheism goes, it must be admitted that he has not succeeded in wooing the majority of atheists to his views. But he has probably rendered theism a service by basing his appeal on experiential rather than rational factors. Perhaps in the future theists, building on Tillich, will find increasingly persuasive ways of showing why "depth experiences" should be given a religious character. At present there does not seem to be a way to compel such a belief.

All in all, Tillich's theology represents a major contribution to the ongoing debate on the nature of God. Paul Tillich has succeeded, undoubtedly, in enhancing theism without transforming it.

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