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Ultimate Concern - Tillich in Dialogue by D. Mackenzie Brown

Donald Mackenzie Brown is Chairman of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of California in Santa Barbara. This book was published in 1965 by Harper & Row, Publishers. This book was prepared for Religion Online by Harry W. and Grace C. Adams.

Paul Tillich explains his religious and philosophical beliefs in small group conversations with scholars conversant with his writings in a spontaneous, simple language.

Preface

Introduction -- Paul Tillich: "A Pervasive Sense of Joy"

First Dialogue

Professor Brown introduces Tillich's thought with several general comments that lead into Dr. Tillich's clarifying finer points of his systematic theology in response to questions about "ultimate concern," "Ground of all Being," estrangement, religion and quasi-religion, being "grasped," and free will.

Second Dialogue

Following requests for general clarification, Tillich offered his definition of terms, including ultimate concern, idolatry, demonization, unconditional secularization, finite and infinite, distorted and profaned, quasi-religion, humanism, and symbols and myths in religion and art.

Third Dialogue

Answers are given by Tillich to questions for clarification about concepts of God, being and existence, love and self-love, finite and infinite, power and vocation, rigidity and fragility, symbol and reality.

Fourth Dialogue

In dialogue with students about socialism as a quasi-religion, Tillich addresses socialism as a replacement for Christianity, Christian and Communist self criticism, the American way of life,

the restoration of religion following socialism, church narrowness, the necessity of symbols.

Fifth Dialogue

In close questioning by students Tillich explores whether Judeo-Christian dialogue is possible, how tolerant both may be, the place of grace, reconciliation, and forgiveness in the dialogue, and what is the concept of progress in Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Sixth Dialogue

After an extensive discussion of kairos as timing in historical events, this dialogue explores the cross as symbol, the term "Son of God," sainthood, Buddha and Christ as historical figures, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and his difference from saints, Christ as a symbol, the death of some religious symbols, and individual experiences of kairos.

Seventh Dialogue

In an extensive description of his antisupernaturalistic attitude toward miracles as suspensions of the laws of nature, Tillich clarifies his understanding of miracles as subjective-objective events that are signs pointing beyond finite reality to ultimate reality, and are perceived by humans in their creaturely freedom in interplay with the directing creativity of God.

Eighth Dialogue

Tillich affirmatively answers a charge that he is theologically dangerous by pointing out the dangers of thinking. The dialogue then moves on to discussions of monasticism, marriage and vocational vows, saintliness, pride and self-assertion, the uniqueness of Christ and his centrality in Western civilization.

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Preface

This book is a record of a seminar with Paul Tillich, considered by many to be the most profound if not the most influential theologian of this century. The discussions took place in the Spring of 1963 at the University of California, Santa Barbara. The seminar was restricted to eighteen senior and graduate students selected from a variety of disciplines ranging from philosophy, religion, and psychology to mathematics, biology, and political science. The editor served as chairman of each session. Visitors at the different meetings included other faculty, students, and, on occasion, clergymen of different denominations. These visitors were necessarily limited because the seating capacity of the seminar room was twenty-four.

No attempt is made to identify any of the participants with the exception of Dr. Tillich. Comments or questions after the heading "Professor" are those of the editor or other faculty present.

Each meeting was tape recorded. The recordings have been edited to eliminate extraneous or repetitious material, to clarify certain passages, and to supply notes on various terms or references to be found in the discussions. The result is, I believe, a fair and accurate presentation of the Seminar.

The original tentative focus of the inquiry was upon the problems raised by the contemporary encounter of major religious systems: Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu; and the quasi-religious movements: Nationalism, Socialism, Fascism, Communism. It quickly became apparent that problems of this nature could not be approached without a thorough understanding and a consensus as to the meaning and nature of Tillichian terms and concepts. Although all members of the seminar had done extensive reading and study of Tillich's writings, his definitions remained obscure in some minds or, even when apparently understood, were vigorously challenged. This led to an open discussion throughout the seminar so that the dialogues returned over and over again to fundamentals even while the general movement of

discussion attempted to deal with contemporary problems of the great religious and quasi-religious movements. This freedom to question informally every premise of Paul Tillich resulted, I believe, in a fuller comprehension of religious terms and values than any formal agenda would have permitted.

Dr. Tillich has read the manuscript to verify the accuracy of statements attributed to him. I very much appreciate the time he has given to this task. I am also indebted to Miss Catherine McKean, a student member of the seminar, for her assistance in transcribing the recordings, to Professor Richard Comstock of the Department of Religious Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara, for his perceptive criticism of the manuscript, and to Cheever M. Brown, student member of the seminar, for contributing the introductory biographical chapter on Tillich.

The bibliography contains all major works of Paul Tillich available in English as well as all major publications in English concerning his religious ideas.

D.M.B.

Santa Barbara

January 21, 1965

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Introduction -- Paul Tillich: "A Pervasive Sense of Joy"

During the weeks of the seminar which this book presents, one quality in Paul Tillich's teaching was especially evident. He maintained throughout the attitude of a fellow searcher after truth, never that of the pedagogue. It was as though each student had some unique experience or insight which Dr. Tillich considered vital to know. He was never so pleased as when he was contradicted and a new viewpoint or an unfamiliar fact was presented to him.. Needless to say, instances of successful contradiction were rare indeed.

No account of Tillich's life can quite explain the enormous influence he has exerted on contemporary religious thought, but such accounts do show the depth and breadth of his experience. He was born in Prussia in the year 1886, five years after the death of Fedor Dostoevski. This fact may seem especially noteworthy, until one considers that much of Tillich's life has been a fight against Dostoevski's Grand Inquisitor "History has shown," says Tillich, "that the Grand Inquisitor is always ready to appear in different disguises, political as well as theological." And so he has constantly been on the lookout for authoritarian systems which threaten to stultify the life of the individual.

Tillich's reaction against authoritarianism in his own life can probably be explained in the light of his early years. He was brought up in the small town of Schonfliess in eastern Germany. The town was medieval, surrounded by a wall, which symbolized for Tillich the narrowness and restrictedness of his environment. Perhaps more important, his father was a conservative Lutheran minister who tried to wield authority over Tillich's way of thinking as well as his actions. In nature Tillich found his first escape, his first freedom as an individual. Through his "mystical participations" in the woods and the fields, he felt he was experiencing the Christian's liberation from bondage which had been Christ's message. In the year 1900 Tillich moved with his family to Berlin and found a new freedom in the openness of a great city. When he attended

the University there, the academic life encouraged individualism and he felt an intellectual autonomy for the first time.

Yet it must not be thought that Tillich was a complete revolutionist. He has often been called a romanticist. As noted, his romanticism involved nature, but it was also concerned with history. He has always revered history "as a living reality in which the past participates in the present." In spite of his early criticism of the nineteenth century, of which he was a part, he sometimes looks back to it with nostalgia for the intellectual freedom he remembers. One might say that his life work has been to restore the Western individual's relation to his tradition by pointing to the timeless elements in that tradition which have been unwittingly rejected by contemporary man — rejected along with those dogmas which science and technology have made unacceptable. In this sense he is a conserver rather than revolutionist.

World War I marks the end of what Tillich calls his preparatory period. There occurred then what he considers a personal *kairos:* during one terrible night of the battle of Champagne, in July of 1916, he witnessed the suffering and death of hundreds of casualties in the division in which he served as chaplain. The horror of that night, during which he lost some of his friends, never left him, and the whole structure of classical idealism under which the war had taken place was shattered. After the war he was engrossed by the new political movements in his defeated nation and has since maintained a keen interest in "religious socialism."

From 1919 to 1933, Tillich wrote all of his German works. During this time he taught at several universities throughout Germany. In 1933 he was forced by Hitler to leave and came to the United States. Through the efforts of Reinhold Niebuhr he was invited to join the faculty of Union Theological Seminary, and it was there that he found a stimulating and sympathetic environment to further develop his ideas. Union Seminary not only provided an introduction to American life but, situated in New York City, became the crossroads for theologians from all over the world. Tillich retained his interest in European society through his contacts with fellow German refugees. At the same time, he was excited by his vision of the New World. He delighted in the American courage to risk failure and remain open to the future.

Tillich reflects Kierkegaard (who greatly influenced him during his student years at the University in Halle) in stressing the need for each individual to confront his existence alone, in the inwardness of his soul. Man's fulfillment must be found through his own inner courage and vision. The fundamental question of human existence — "What am I?" — can only be answered by one who asks the question.

In part it is the chronology of Tillich's life, spanning the two world wars, spanning the conflicts of science and religion, politics and ethics, authority and freedom in this century, that makes his analyses of the religious situation and the problems of our day so meaningful. One suspects, however, that neither his placement in the history of ideas nor even his intellectual genius would in themselves have provided the power which he has wielded in the thought of our time.

One might explain it by saying again that he has remained always the student as well as the teacher. Tillich expresses it best perhaps in his "Autobiographical Reflections": "I have always walked up to a desk or pulpit with fear and trembling, but the contact with the audience gives me a pervasive sense of joy, the joy of a creative communion, of giving and taking, even if the audience is not vocal."[1]

1. "Autobiographical Reflections of Paul Tillich," in *The Theology of Paul Tillich,* Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall, eds. (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1961), p. 15.

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First Dialogue

Tillich's Theology

Professor: Through his monumental *Systematic Theology*, his other publications, and his long association with Western theologians, philosophers, and psychologists, Paul Tillich has presented a fresh approach to problems of the Western religious tradition. He has something to say on the contemporary role of Christianity; on Judaism, Islam, Buddhism; on international conflict; on the individual sense of moral futility and personal estrangement. By way of introducing Dr. Tillich and initiating our discussions, I shall attempt to present a few of the positions from which he has approached religious problems.

He prefers to begin with the "human situation." No one probes the meaning of words and symbols more profoundly than he, but abstractions as such are not his primary interest. He does not base his system on the problem of the existence of God, which he believes is a question that should not be asked, and which, by contrast, marks the beginning of some theological systems. Such systems present five or seven or so-and-so-many proofs for the existence of God and on the basis of these proofs advance arguments that, because God exists, such-and-such must be true, and then that this or that other must also be true. Tillich begins, rather, with the human predicament. In that sense he is an existentialist. To him, the primary problem is our situation, our sense of estrangement and the tension in which we live.

I would say that Tillich sees theological language and religious ritual as symbolic, in themselves lacking eternal truth but pointing nevertheless to the eternal and the ultimate. He insists that symbols — church, Communion, or baptism — must be kept meaningful as society changes. Otherwise, in the course of time they become empty and cease to point to the realities they originally symbolized. They lose their redeeming power, and appear important in themselves. This constitutes idolatry. When man venerates an idea, or a book or sacred object, without awareness of what it stands for, he may never see the religious truth behind the symbol.

Tillich defines faith, and indirectly religion, as "ultimate concern." Religion is direction or movement toward the ultimate or the unconditional And God rightly defined might be called the Unconditional. God, in the true sense, is indefinable. Since the Unconditional precedes our minds and precedes all created things, God cannot be confined by the mind or by words. Tillich sees God as Being-Itself, or the "Ground of all Being." For this reason there cannot be *a* God. There cannot even be a "highest God," for even that concept is limiting. We cannot make an object out of God. And the moment we say he is the highest God or anything else, we have made him an object. Thus, beyond the God of the Christian or the God of the Jews, there is the "God beyond God." This God cannot be said to exist or not to exist in the sense that we exist. Either statement is limiting. We cannot make a *thing* out of God, no matter how holy this thing may be, because there still remains something behind the holy thing which is its ground or basis, the "ground of being."

Since we are finite creatures, we are separated from this infinite ground or foundation of our being. And feeling this estrangement, we experience anxiety. We may consult a psychiatrist, and the psychiatrist may attempt to solve our problem. But Tillich insists that while the psychiatrist can cure many anxieties — particularly the unnecessary exaggerated, or unreasonable ones — he can never cure this basic anxiety. Psychiatry deals with the finite, whereas this anxious estrangement results from our separation as finite beings from what is infinite or unconditional.

What overcomes this separation and brings us into communion with the ultimate ground of being, and into awareness of the meaning of our life, is love. Love is thus the most powerful and important aspect of religion. To define it in another way: Love is the drive to bring together that which has been separated.

Paradoxically, Tillich sees religion itself as one of the great dangers to the religious life. Why? Because religious systems tend to become rigid with age. And when they become rigid they suppress the inquiry, the dynamic, the love, and the insight that gave them their original inspiration and growth. Continuous individual research for the deepest meanings of rituals and symbols is absolutely necessary to preserve the vitality of religion. And unfortunately all religions tend eventually to defeat and discourage that search, a fact which presents us with the existential problem: How can we restore the meaning of religious symbols and goals which have been challenged and sometimes destroyed by the emergence of technology, bourgeois ways of life, nationalism, and the quasi-religions?

Having presented this necessarily inadequate sketch of the theology of Paul Tillich I should now like to ask Dr. Tillich if he has any comments or questions he would care to make at this time. We may then proceed with questions and discussion by members of the seminar.

Two Concepts of Religion

Dr. Tillich: I thank you very much. I think we now have in view those principles which are especially important for our discussion. Of course there are many other problems, but I believe these are the most important. Perhaps I may formulate the matter in a slightly different way at one point, since it is so fundamental to the whole seminar.

Behind this system, as has been implied, are two concepts of religion. And this fact is so fundamental that, although we shall need to discuss it more fully, an over-all comment should be made here: If religion is defined as a state of "being grasped by an ultimate concern" — which is also my definition of faith — then we must distinguish this as a universal or large concept from our usual smaller concept of religion which supposes an organized group with its clergy, scriptures, and dogma, by which a set of symbols for the ultimate concern is accepted and cultivated in life and thought. This is religion in the narrower sense of the word, while religion defined as "ultimate concern" is religion in the larger sense of the word. The distinction of the larger concept provides us with a criterion by which to judge the concrete religions included under the smaller, traditional concept. Specific religions are inherently susceptible to criticism which keeps them alive or condemns them to come to an end, if they cannot qualify under the power of this ultimate principle.

This is why in my little book *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* [1] I have discussed the concept of quasi-religions — ideologies such as nationalism or socialism, which claim the loyalty or veneration of their followers with the intensity sometimes of the theistic religions. This term "quasi-religion" would be meaningless if we defined religion solely in the smaller, narrower sense of the word.

But in the light of the larger concept we can understand that ultimate concern is also present in what we usually call the secular or profane. In Europe the word "profane" does not have the bad connotation it has acquired in English, but retains the sense of the old Latin *prof anus*,[2] meaning "outside the doors of the sacred," in the marketplace, which is not in itself bad. It is possible for this secular or profane reality to express ultimate concern, and so we have the concept of quasi-religion. But of course these quasi-religions must come under the same criticism as the religions proper. They have their own danger, namely, complete secularization and emptiness, while the religions proper, religions in the narrower sense, are subject to the danger of what I call demonization, which occurs when particular symbols and ideas are absolutized and become idols themselves. Thus we are faced by two opposing dangers: on the one hand, what we may call secularization (although I still prefer "profanization") — a process of becoming more and more empty or materialistic without any ultimate concern; and on the other hand, demonization which makes one particular religious symbol, group, usage, world view — or whatever — absolute. On this basis we may perhaps consider the problems of the world religions.

Student: Could you distinguish more sharply between the "narrower" sense and the "broad" sense of religion? What are the specific differences?

Dr. Tillich: Now, the ordinary concepts which we connect with the word religion are: entering a temple, going to a church, belonging to a church sect or religious movement, and having particular symbols or ideas about God, particular sacramental and ritual activities. All this is the concern of religious groups. And when we speak of the world religions, we usually think of these groups and what characterizes them: their ideas and their practical and imaginary symbols. But if we look deeper, we must say that religion is larger than this. Religion — namely, an ultimate concern about the meaning of one's life and the meaning of "being" as such — also appears in other forms. It may appear in a painting which has no religious content in the traditional sense — the painting of a stone, or a portrait, or a scene, or clouds. Or it may appear in philosophy as an ultimate concern through which the philosopher tries to understand reality. Or it may appear in a political idea. The idea of democracy has achieved such a character for some Western nations, as has communism for some Eastern nations, and nationalism for almost all nations.

So we have here two concepts, and the narrower sense is what you will probably find in most dictionaries if you look up the definition of religion. Perhaps one of you will consult the dictionary to see if it offers simply the first concept, or perhaps also the second. Now it would be interesting to me to see the larger concept confirmed by a dictionary, and surprising.[3] In any case, if you want to know what religion in the narrower sense is, any dictionary will tell you exactly. But religion in the larger sense is a special development of the philosophical interpretation of religion, and I would say a special consequence of events in some of the great religions which are in a sense antireligious. Jesus was antireligious and Buddha was antireligious,[4] and there are others like them, but we shall discuss them later.

What is "Ultimate Concern"?

Student: My question relates to this ultimate concern of which you speak. I have read your books and have discussed this idea with different people I know, both in the church and out of it. And the concept seems to be readily understood by most. I mean that people who go to church usually have a concern with the ultimate, one way or another. But somehow I think that in our modern system of education, and in the way that most action-minded Americans are raised, the idea of being grasped by this concern is a hard one for most people to understand. They seem to go at it from the other direction. Is there some way in which this could be clarified, in your opinion?

Dr. Tillich: I don't fully understand you. What is the hard thing?

Student: The idea of being grasped by this concern. Most people go at it positively: they say, "Well, do you yourself freely accept Jesus Christ as your savior?" If one says yes or no they go on from there. But the other idea, that you don't deliberately choose anything, that instead you are grasped by this ultimate principle — that is hard. How does one go about it?

Dr. Tillich: In your question I think two problems are combined. One is the general idea of ultimate concern. I have sometimes explained it successfully, to people who are shocked by the term or not readily able to comprehend it, as taking something with ultimate seriousness, unconditional seriousness. That is a useful translation. It is not as good as "concern," but to "take seriously" is a kind of concern. And the term is in some cases easier than the word "concern." If people tell you, "I have no ultimate concern," which all of you have probably heard, then ask them, "Is there really nothing at all that you take with unconditional seriousness? What, for instance, would you be ready to suffer or even die for?" Then you will discover that even the cynic takes his cynicism with ultimate seriousness, not to speak of the others, who may be naturalists, materialists, Communists, or whatever. They certainly take something with ultimate seriousness.

That deals with one question. The other problem is that of being grasped. When you find what it is that a person takes so seriously, then and there you can say, "He is grasped by it." This means that, as his life has developed, this seriousness was not produced by active, reflective, voluntary processes, but came to him, perhaps very early, and never left him. Take the scientist. If he has matured in the scientific tradition, he is willing to give up every particular of his scientific findings (they are all preliminary, never final), but he will never give up the scientific attitude, even if a tyrant should demand it of him. Or if he were weak enough to give it up, he would do it with a bad conscience. And every Communist youth who takes communism seriously would be the same. That is how we are grasped. We cannot produce it, cannot say, "I will make this or that a matter of my ultimate concern." It has already grasped us when we begin to reflect on it.

Now if it comes to religion proper, or religion in the narrower sense, there are two ways in which this grasping happens. The one way is exactly the same way as with the scientist or Communist, or the nationalist, or the American liberal humanist: they have grown up in it. It has meaning for them. They would fight for it. They wouldn’t give it up.

On the other hand, it sometimes happens that some other form of ultimate concern, different from what we grew up in, comes to us from outside. This is the missionary situation, or the situation we usually call conversion. And there are less dramatic ways. Suddenly, in a lecture or in a talk with a friend, something clicks with us; before that it was meaningless. We had heard it before, we perhaps understood it to a certain extent, but it failed to click — and then suddenly it does. This is a more intellectual type of conversion experience, but it can have great consequences in the long run.

The word "grasped" is a translation of the German. Perhaps it is too strong, and your friends may have the feeling that it always means a dramatic conversion experience. Not at all. It means only that we did not produce it, but found it in ourselves. It may have developed gradually, it may sometimes be the result of a dramatic experience. But it does not really occur — and here is my criticism of pietistic conversion ideas — through the establishment of a method for

achieving it. This criticism, incidentally, has nothing to do with the Methodist church, where this type of conversion is as rare as in all other big churches. But I have used the word "method" as did the Pietists and the revivalists, to mean that, in order to be grasped, we must go through this dramatic experience. I am against all this. Of course it may happen, but if you make a method out of it and insist that it must happen that way, then our friends are right in saying they don't understand it. I myself cannot speak of this "grasping" as a dramatic event.

Student: I was thinking in more Christian terminology of the concept of the mystical body that was implanted not necessarily at baptism, but in the person. As the person becomes aware of this power within himself, he begins to surrender more and more of his worldly nature to it. And the power grows in him.

Dr. Tillich: Now "implanted" is not bad — at least, for special usage. I mean, you have described the church-going Christian. But there are all the other types Professor Brown and I have mentioned. These other types of experience are different; they are more dialectical. But it is very interesting that you use that word "implant"; I think it describes very well the church Christian in a good sense.

Student: What would you think of the term "overcome by"?

Dr. Tillich: That is a dramatic experience that certainly occurs. There, "overcome" is a good word.

Student: "Being arrested by"?

Dr. Tillich: That is also a dramatic term. "Arrested": I have a sermon, I think, in *The Eternal Now* where I speak of "being arrested by God." I think this word is good in some cases, and I am glad that we are suddenly discovering many terms. We can use any of them, if the word "grasped" offends us.

Student: It seems to me that almost all these terms imply a more or less permanent state; an implicit denial, perhaps, of free will that bothers me a bit. I wish you could explain a little more what you mean by "grasped." To my mind, we can be grasped by something, but can also be grasped by something else which may be diametrically opposed. And we vacillate between these things. Perhaps while still traveling in one direction, we may weave back and forth.

Dr. Tillich: Now that actually describes the life of most of us today. You are absolutely right. Nevertheless, the ultimate that grasps us will be more powerful, demanding a decision of our whole personality. Yet it is not produced bu our own intellect or will; it is something that transcends our decision. A very good example of what you point out may be found in Luther, who says, "Man is like a horse which is ridden by a rider; it is either God or the devil." For

Luther, of course, these were the alternatives. Actually, there are many less extreme riders, or powers of ultimate concern, which try to grasp us.

But to speak of free will, we ourselves never make the decision in this respect; it never comes from ourselves. If it did, it would not be ultimate. We would be making the decision immediately as something we could revoke at any moment. But to take something with ultimate seriousness is not a matter of saying, "I will now take this with final seriousness, and tomorrow something else." I think Luther's description of the experience is psychologically much sounder, although he did not deny the freedom of participating in it with our whole personality — which in fact means freedom. On the other hand, he knew well from his own experience that we ourselves cannot produce the ultimate concern, and this is what "being grasped" means.

Student: The chief trouble I have in replacing a traditional word — in Western tradition the word "God" — with the term "ultimate concern" is that this puts the discussion in a wholly subjective realm. It describes how we feel about this, that, or the other object, without naming the object. It tells us nothing about the nature of ultimate reality, except that we are concerned about something in such and such a fashion.

Dr. Tillich: Yes, and you are not the first to bring up this argument. Of course, we cannot replace "God" by "ultimate concern," but we can and must understand that the term ultimate concern, like the German phrase of which it is a translation is intentionally ambiguous. It indicates, on the one hand, *our* being ultimately concerned — the subjective side — and on the other hand, the *object* of our ultimate concern for which of course there is no other word than "ultimate". Now, in this relationship, the history of religion can be described as the attempt to find what can with justification be called this object. And in all religions this object is called "God." Whether it's a little fetish, a tool used daily by a very primitive tribe, or the *mona* power that permeates all reality, or Olympus, with its Greek gods and every special god there, or the God of Israel who, through prophetic criticism, finally became the word "God," the object is always the same. The object of ultimate concern has many names. And we call all that is not concerned with the truly ultimate — that is something finite but worshiped as ultimate — we call that idolatry. That is the idolizing danger of religion. I have also termed this the demonic danger of religion. There is a certain difference in nuances, but we can refer to the idolizing danger. And the decisive thing is that even monotheism can be idolatrous, which means that the God of monotheism, the theistic god, as my term is in *The Courage To Be*, can become an idol like an animal god of the half-animal gods of Egypt. And the henotheistic god of old Israel was already an idol when the prophets fought against this misuse of the God of Israel.

Your next question is probably, "What is ultimate? What is the true object of our ultimate concern?" The problem here is, does our image of the divine elevate something finite to infinity in the wrong way? And here we come to the Christological problem and many others. You see, one cannot abstract such a term as "ultimate concern" from the whole body of thought to which it belongs. If we understand the context in which it appears, it is, like all religious things, both

subjective and objective. Ultimate concern can never be merely objective. That is what Professor Brown meant in the beginning, when he spoke of not making God into an object. So there is a long answer to a short question!

Student: Then you mean that without the mind of man there is nothing ultimate. If the ultimate is dependent on man's concern for this subject-object relationship, then without the mind of man it disappears. So then the ultimate is dependent on the mind of man?

Dr. Tillich: Now that is the same question formulated in another way. The mind of man is the only mind that is aware of ultimacy. In this sense, the mind of man is necessary for religion. But the mountains we see outside the window are also in the hands of the ultimate. It is their ultimate ground, but they do not know about it. They are not aware of it — or at least, we are not aware of their awareness. Some people, however, especially among the German Romantics and their British followers, have expressed the contrary. Even my great teacher, Schelling, the main philosopher of German Romanticism in the first half of the nineteenth century, speaks of the plants having a god. Many Romantics accept the idea, and it is well accepted in poetry. But I would not accept it as a theological or philosophical statement. If we do speak in this manner, we must mean that God is God for a plant as he is for man. But since we do not know the inner life of the plant we can only say poetically that the beauty of the plant gives glory to God, which is what the Psalms are saying all the time. The idea that plants are aware of their own "ultimate ground" is something, again, that I would readily allow the poet, but not myself as a theologian.

So the human mind, indeed, is the place we know in the universe — there may be many other places, but this is the only one we know — where the relationship to the ground of being comes to awareness, and produces great movements which we call religion.

Student: Then would you say that the God we know from our own religious background is merely a shadow of the ultimate — just a glimpse? Since an individual is capable of knowing or experiencing the ultimate only to the predestined degree that has been allotted him, then is the God we know merely a circumference of the greater God that is beyond man's own understanding and experience?

Dr. Tillich: "Circumference" and "shadow" are not good metaphors. I would prefer to say "symbol" or "symbolic expression." Of course it should never be said that God is a symbol, because the term "God" implies both the God beyond God, or the ultimate ground of being, and at the same time the particular expression. Only the latter has the character of a symbol. Now the best story in this respect is probably the dialogue between Moses and God (Exod. 33:18—23). Moses tries to go beyond the symbolic knowledge of God. And God tells him that if he sees him face to face he must die. Yet he can see God walking along, and can see him from behind. This is a wonderful half-poetic, half-metaphorical expression of the necessity by which every religious language remains symbolic. And in this sense I would recommend that

you drop the metaphors "circumference" and "shadow." "Circumference" you may have learned from Karl Jaspers — I don't know. If not, you are as original as he. He regards this experience as the "embracing of the divine." But I don't think this is a good word. Every statement about this "embracing" he calls a cipher. He does not use the word "symbol," but the word "cipher." He says that the work of the philosopher and the theologian is to decipher the ciphers and to understand the relationship of the all-embracing to the complete reality. So with your circumference you are not far off.

I would say, however, that I prefer the metaphorical language of Nicolaus Cusanos, about whom you should know something. I refer to one of his works about the peace of religion in my last little book,[5] and I would be very happy if you could find time to read about him, at least in a history of philosophy or encyclopedia, so that you would have some idea as to why he is so important for our problem. Cusanos is a mathematician, and also has the idea of using the metaphors of center and periphery. He says God is in everything as its center, and that, on the other hand, the whole world is his periphery. He is expanded in the world; and the world is contracted in him. Now these are mathematical metaphors which I feel are more adequate than those used by Jaspers and yourself. Although I am glad you used the term circumference, the centered presence of the divine is lacking. And this criticism may also be directed against the whole idealistic philosophy of Jaspers.

Student: Can the object of our ultimate concern be emotional as well as intellectual? For instance, isn't the purpose of an artist when he paints a picture in part emotional as well as intellectual?

Dr. Tillich: Oh, I would even go further! I would say that the very term ultimate concern implies the emotional, perhaps even more strongly than the intellectual. In my book *The Dynamics of Faith* I discuss particularly the intellect, the will, and the emotional side of man, and say that a religious experience always implies all three. Therefore if a painter has, let's say, artistic expression as his ultimate concern, this then is his religion. If nothing else but artistic expression is involved, he approaches the borderline of idolatry. The scientist for whom nothing but science is a matter of ultimate concern stands in the same danger. In both instances, however, all three so-called functions decisive in the centered personality of man — intellect, emotion, and will — are present.

Student: Suppose this ultimate concern, being emotional, is not concerned with God but with an object which is "moving" in itself? Is this still a valid religion, or is it something else?

Dr. Tillich: Now give an example of what you mean by "moving."

Student: Well, something from nature, a tree or a mountain.

Dr. Tillich: Oh, I am most pagan with respect to trees! Of course, the adoration of trees was a

great thing in Homeric Greece. There were many divine powers identified with trees. And this is to be found in any history of religion. In a rather secularized way, it is still true of myself. But I would subordinate them to the *Logos,*[6] let us say, as the self-manifestation of the divine. I would try not to transform them into independent gods. That would be idolatry. Of course such idolatry may suddenly occur. There are naturalists with lofty religious feelings — I know one of them — in whom the subordination of the love of nature to the ground of being is almost forgotten in the enthusiasm for natural objects. And we then waver on the edge of idolatry.

Professor: Our time is almost up. Is there a final question?

Destiny or Free Will

Student: I would like to pursue one question which I think was not entirely answered, the matter of free will. Do we understand you to say, Dr. Tillich, that the ultimate concern which grasps — or whatever term you may wish to use — is not a matter of free will? Does it precede free will, since it precedes the mind and creation? Does the individual therefore have no choice in the matter, since something grasps him regardless of his own wishes? Do you mean that, if it is truly an ultimate concern, it is beyond free will?

Dr. Tillich: Free will in the sense of the discussion between determinism and indeterminism is for me an obsolete question. It is obsolete because, for me, it no longer has meaning. The philosophical word has transcended it. And it has transcended it with the rise of the phenomenological method, which does not first of all objectify man, make him into a thing, and then ask the question whether his behavior is determined by necessity or by contingency or circumstances. Since the reappearance of the phenomenological method after 1900 we have clearly seen that, if we begin with man as a thing, the problem is insoluble. If we begin with man as an object, then determinism is certainly the answer. The only alternative, in that case, is to inquire into the justification for using these categories for man at all. For in the study of man these categories are, in fact, not usable. When we give a phenomenological description of what happens in an act of moral decision, we know that neither necessity nor contingency is involved, but a total reaction of our centered being.

Now we call this total act of our centered being "freedom." We know at the same time, however, that this freedom is not absolute, but is embedded in a matrix produced by our destiny, by what we are as male or female, as people of a certain family or religious tradition or type of education. And all the former decisions which we have made now help to determine us. This entire process is implied. And I call it the pull of destiny. So instead of contingency and necessity I prefer to speak of freedom and destiny. As the phenomenological description of acts of freedom, this is a further clarification of my basic answer to the religious problem of being grasped. Otherwise the problem can never be solved.

When we read the New Testament, especially Paul, we find that what he, and the reformers

after him, constantly strive against is the idea that we ourselves can produce the presence of the divine Spirit (which is a more concrete religious symbol for ultimate concern). If we attempt to do so, we fall into the error, the illusion, that we can produce (to speak now in concrete religious terms) a merciful God, or the presence of the divine Spirit, or the ecstasy of the ultimate concern. We cannot produce, but we are not unfree to receive or accept. This, of course, is the basis of the concept of freedom which I have developed.

Professor: Our time is up. Is there any last thing that you would like to say, Dr. Tillich?

Dr. Tillich: Oh, I hope we shall be as vivid in all our sessions as we were today. Thank you for your questions!

NOTES:

1. All works by Tillich mentioned in the text will be found fully listed in the Bibliography.

2. Latin *pro,* "before" plus *fanum,* "temple."

3. *Webster's International Dictionary,* 3d ed., gives the following definitions of religion (summarized here): 1. The service and adoration of God or a god as expressed in forms of worship, in obedience to divine commands. 2. The state of life of a religious; as, to enter or retire into religion. 3. One of the systems of faith and worship. 4. The profession or practice of religious beliefs; religious observances collectively. 5. Devotion or fidelity; scrupulous conformity. 6. An apprehension, awareness, or conviction of the existence of a supreme being, or more widely, of supernatural powers, or influences controlling one's own, humanity's or nature's destiny. 7. Religious faith and practice personified. 8. A pursuit, an object of pursuit, a principle, or the like, arousing in one religious convictions and feelings such as great faith, devotion, or fervor, or followed with religious zeal, conscientiousness or fidelity.

4. "Antireligious" in the sense that they challenged prevailing religious institutions.

5. *De Pace Fidei* ("The Peace Between the Different Forms of Faith"). Tillich refers to it on pp. 40-41 of his *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions.*

6. "The Word" (John 1:1-18).

return to religion-online

Ultimate Concern - Tillich in Dialogue by D. Mackenzie Brown

Donald Mackenzie Brown is Chairman of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of California in Santa Barbara. This book was published in 1965 by Harper & Row, Publishers. This book was prepared for Religion Online by Harry W. and Grace C. Adams.

Second Dialogue

Professor: I have had differing reactions from students regarding our last meeting. There was enthusiasm for what was discussed and a desire to explore as thoroughly as possible all the problems raised. Again, however, there seemed to be some doubt as to the validity of approaching these problems from such an unorthodox point of view, and a feeling of the need for more orientation and definition. Finally, there appeared to be a bit of outright opposition, a protest that some of the statements made were simply not true. All this I think is an excellent foundation for a seminar. If we had not had such reactions, I would say it had been a dull beginning.

With this in mind, are there any of you who wish now a further development of the principles discussed at our first meeting? If so, we should pursue that development before going on.

Idolatry and Demonization Distinguished from Ultimate Concern

Student: Dr. Tillich, I feel that probably the basis of your whole philosophy is this "ultimate concern." I am still not entirely clear, so far as I am concerned, as to what you mean by that term. Since it is so basic, could you explain further?

Dr. Tillich: You said, so far as *you* are concerned. Now immediately we have an example. You are concerned to a certain degree about following my ideas and going through this seminar. It is a problem for you. But it is not a question of which you would say that it is a matter of life and death — namely, of life in the ultimate sense of finding and actualizing the meaning of life. It is important, but not ultimately important. But the moment religion comes into the picture, then it is not a matter that is *also* important, or *very* important, or *very, very* important. For then nothing is comparable with it in importance. It is unconditionally important. That's what ultimate concern means.

Student: Then you do not mean by ultimate concern anything that would transcend us? Can it be just something of everyday life? If we are willing to die for it, it is ultimate; and if we are not willing to die for it, then it is conditional?

Dr. Tillich: Oh, you see, I should not have used those words "life and death," because actually I could die for the most unworthy cause. It is not life and death in that sense that I mean, but in the sense of Hamlet's "To be or not to be," which does not mean either to die or to live a few years longer, but to find an answer to the ultimate question of the meaning of life. I mean the words in this sense. The word "transcendent" which you used belongs to a much later stage of discussing *what* can be the ultimate concern. But first we must clarify what the term itself means, and then we can discuss what it can *become.*

Student: It isn't, then, just being willing to die for something?

Dr. Tillich: No, not at all! We could die for a bad cause — for instance, in Hitler's Germany. That is not necessarily a matter of ultimate concern, although it could be for some persons. We may go to nurse a contagious illness, or risk death when we fight in a war, or explore countries where there is great possibility of our not surviving, and we think the risk is worth it. Such a risk *can* be a matter of ultimate concern, but I would say then that it is misplaced ultimate concern. I might say this of the Nazis who made people believe in Hitler as the voice of God for the Germans. And they believed that the German people and the Nordic race were the elected — selected by God. This was a bad cause, a demonic cause, to use my word. For them it was a matter of ultimate concern. But the question of dying or not dying is very secondary. There are many sacrifices much greater than giving one's life. In the last paper I read by Erich Fromm, he even derives all wars from the desire to die or see the death of others. I should not have used the words "life and death" in this sense. I should have used, as I usually do, Hamlet's words "To be or not to be," which include much more. Or finding or losing the meaning of one's life, as Jesus expressed it quite clearly when he said, "He who will lose his life will find it; and he who will seek his life will lose it" [Matt. 10:39]. This is not life in the sense of survival, but life in the sense of finding the precious jewel, something that carries ultimate concern. This concern is expressed in almost every word of Jesus, and especially in the great commandment, to which he adds, "with all your heart, and all your mind, and all your strength," and so on [Matt. 22:37]. That is with finality or with seriousness.

Student: Yes, I will admit that in the Scriptures Christ himself used terms with ultimacy, but do we have any evidence that an ordinary person can have or ever has had a truly ultimate concern — in other words, a concern that is not in some sense conditioned? Do we have any evidence of this at all?

Dr. Tillich: Every *concrete* concern is probably conditioned. That is, there is always a mixture of finite elements, interests, or psychological motives that makes it questionable. But we are again making the mistake of considering the content. We must be able logically to distinguish the

concept of ultimate Concern and the *content* of ultimate concern. And if we cannot make this distinction between them, then the discussion has no sense; it is meaningless, especially in relationship to other religions. If we cannot see the ultimate concern in a Buddhist, but rather immediately assert that he is not a Christian and thus has no ultimate concern, we cannot understand foreign religions.

It is very important, therefore, to distinguish the fundamental fact of ultimate concern from the much larger question, with innumerable implications which we have not yet approached, namely: *What* is the most adequate expression of ultimacy? Then the conflict of the religions must be considered. We ourselves claim, for instance, that the Christian message, or the event on which Christianity is based, is the purest form in which ultimacy has appeared. The Buddhists believe that, just *because* the Buddha has less historical character than Jesus, Buddhism is superior. And the humanists whom you must meet here on this campus, as I have in all the great universities, have an ultimate concern with the humanistic ideal, usually expressed today in scientific terms. I myself believe that the humanistic ideal is inferior to the Christ concept, but their concern is genuine. These are distinctions which we can make as to content, but all have meaning only if we first clearly comprehend the formal concept of ultimate concern.

Another example may be found in Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason,* where he makes the absolute distinction between the unconditional character of the moral imperative and the innumerable different contents this unconditional imperative has. And he who perceives this difference does not need to feel disturbed about whether he is a Christian theologian or a contemporary American humanist. He does not need to be shocked by the primitive savage who may seem to hold opposite ethics dear. For the moral imperative for the savage is as unconditional in the realm in which he experiences personal relationships as it is for us. Both they and we stand under the same unconditional character of the moral imperative. If such distinctions are not made, then of course it is not possible to judge good or bad, or religions at all.

Professor: Dr. Tillich, you have said that unconditional concern is an absolute and utter concern, that it cannot be conditioned, but that the content of various individual manifestations of this may vary in degree and nature?

Dr. Tillich: Yes, exactly. Not only among individuals, but also among whole cultures, whole religions, or whole nations. Each can be very different from the others.

Professor: Would you apply this reasoning to the Fascist and the Nazi as well as to the Buddhist?

Dr. Tillich: Of course, but I would say that while genuine dialogue with Buddhists and Hindus and Islam is possible, and while a genuine dialogue is possible with humanists and socialists and people who are nationalists (in the sense in which the word is used in this country), it is not

possible with Nazism, for instance. Fascism is a demonization of nationalism, as Communism is a demonization of socialism, and scientism is a demonization of humanism. It prevents intelligent dialogue with them. There is also demonization in religions. For example, the church of the Inquisition was a demonization of Christianity. Some types of superstition in Buddhism and Hinduism are demonizations of these religions, especially among the common people.

We must distinguish — but this anticipates the later stages of our discussion — between the genuine meaning of a religion and its profanization or secularization. That is one thing that can happen, and the other is demonization. In the moment when demoralization takes place, I would say that dialogue becomes impossible because of the distortion involved. Now I would *not* say that the Communist distortion of socialism is identical with present-day life in Russia. And the same is true of Italian Fascism: I was in Italy at the time Fascism was in power. This did not mean that the whole nation was distorted, although the fundamental Fascist ideas represented by the high priests of Fascism, or Nazism, were demonizations. I have the same feeling about some types of "Christianity." I personally think that some forms of fundamentalism are a soul-destroying demonization of Christianity, because they foster dishonesty.

Student: You referred to Nazism as a misplaced ultimate concern. Do you imply by this that there is something else meant by ultimate concern which would render Nazism misplaced? Or are you seeing Nazism from your own particular bias or ultimate concern?

Dr. Tillich: Now you see you are always pressing for content! All right! Since you are, we must travel in that direction and come back to the other later.

Professor: Before you do, I think the question that hangs over all of this is: Are there any characteristics of ultimate concern in itself which will enable us to distinguish between genuine religion, which functions in this ultimate sense, and "religion" associated with distorted secular movements? When we speak of ultimate concern, is it in any way a discriminating term? Does it help us to identify and distinguish one faith from another?

Dr. Tillich: Yes, that is what I wish to answer. There *is* a criterion, namely, the word "ultimacy"; and ultimacy means nothing finite. Nothing which by its very nature is finite can rightly become a matter of ultimate concern.

Let me give an example. Many boys are ruined because they make their mother their "ultimate concern." The mother cannot help but be a very high symbol of concern, but the moment she is made a matter of ultimate concern — or deified (it is usually unconscious, of course) — the consequences are always destructive. For if we make a finite reality into a god, we enter the realm of idolatry. Instead of speaking of wrong ultimate concern I might use the word idolatry, which is the elevation of something finite into ultimacy. The consequence is always destructive, because this finite then destroys other finites. The deification of the mother, for example, prevents the boy from having a normal, open personal relationship to other women. And the

effects of this can be seen in any educational institution, such as this one, where some boys have to be sent to a psychoanalyst.

Another example is the relationship between nations. If a nation makes itself absolute, then necessarily, although it is only a particular reality, in the name of its absolute claim it is compelled to overcome all other nations. Instead of trying to communicate with them, it tries to destroy them, because it makes itself absolute. Much imperialistic development can be traced to this.

Even in Christianity, Jesus' conflict with his disciples concerned just this point. They wanted to make him, in his finitude, ultimate — namely "the Christ." And therefore Jesus called Peter demonic, saying, "Go away, Satan!" when he tried to persuade the Master not to sacrifice his finitude on the cross. This is a wonderful example. And for me it is the most revealing story in the whole of the synoptic Gospels, for in it we find two great elements: on the one hand the acknowledgment, "Thou art the Christ," which means "he who will come and bring the end, the fulfillment of reality"; and on the other the answer, "But I must go to Jerusalem, and then die." Peter insists that this must not happen. And Jesus says in effect, "This is a satanic temptation that you represent" [Matt. 16:2V23].[1] Here, in this story, we have the whole problem of ultimate concern and idolatry.

Professor: Must we then add to that term *"un*finite" ultimate concern?

Dr. Tillich: No, we cannot do it grammatically that way. But it is certainly implied. It is indeed implied. All concerns with finite things, even our concern with this seminar, are preliminary; they are not ultimate. Perhaps we might use the word "infinite concern," a different word, which is Kierkegaardian since it evokes his "infinite passion." I would be glad to designate it this way. Or you may believe that simply "concern" is best. If you want to use "seriousness" or "passion" or "interest" (also a word of Hegel's and therefore of Kierkegaard), you can use these terms. They all are meaningful, although they have their shortcomings. "Concern," which I find the best word, also has shortcomings. One word, however, we *must* choose.

Student: The term which I personally have found useful is "the absolutely trustworthy."

Dr. Tillich: Trust is one element in this concern. There is also awe. And we must experience both trust and awe. But these elements are consequences that go more into the description of the content of the concern. I would follow you in this but I would not include those words in the formal definition.

Student: I have one more question. I asked it once before, but do not really feel that I've been answered. You have said that ultimate concern cannot be based on something finite; is that correct?

Dr. Tillich: Yes, for instance, in the moment Christ, or Jesus, went the way of the cross, he *could* become the Christ, and not before.

Student: Now I know of concerns that I have, and they are various. One will be more important than another, and I have one concern that is above all other concerns. But this top concern is not necessarily the ultimate concern that you are talking about.

Dr. Tillich: No. You can have a highest concern in the realm of the finite. You can say for instance, "I have concern for my wife, for my children, for my job, for my work, but in a critical moment, my nation is a higher concern." That is the preaching we heard, day by day, in our imperial period in Germany. "The highest concern is the nation." Now this might be true in relation to other finite things, because society itself is a presupposition of the existence of all its members. But when a nation comes into conflict with the really ultimate concern, then we have to protest against the idolizing of the nation. We may have to be killed or exiled because of this protest. But you see, the unconditional or ultimate should not be viewed as part of a pyramid, even if its place is at the top. For the ultimate is that which is the ground *and* the top at the same time, or the embracing of the pyramid.

Student: It is qualitatively different?

Dr. Tillich: Very good!

Student: Hence the question I asked before: What evidence do we have for supposing that there is a concern qualitatively different from that which is based on the finite?

Dr. Tillich: We can only point to it. People have made it known; and we can find it in ourselves. There is no external evidence for it.

Student: Is it existential? One has to experience it himself?

Dr. Tillich: Oh, of course. If we don’t experience it ourselves, we cannot even speak of it. And my thesis is that everybody experiences it at some time or place, although often it is hard to discover, for oneself or for others. But it is my experience that among all the human beings I have ever met — quite a few! — I have never found anybody who had nothing which he took with unconditional seriousness. There was always something. The ultimate experiment, perhaps, is to find out from the cynic who says to you, "I don’t take anything seriously," what he actually does take seriously; sometimes it is his glory in his cynicism, or possibly his despair in it. Since I know this qualitatively different concern in myself, I can perhaps see it or recognize it also in others. If one has never recognized it in oneself, even though it is there, it is hard to recognize in others.

Looking at the history of religions, we find that there are people who cannot explain their

concern in any other way than that they felt driven to their action or mode of life. Let us leave the example of Christ for the moment and consider the influence of Buddha. Most human beings in eastern Asia for 2,500 years now have found the meaning of their life expressed in what the historical or mythological Buddha (really both) did when he abandoned everything, left behind what he could have had in glory, for a concern that transcended him. That is what I mean by ultimate concern.

Student: Is it not inevitable for an infinite concern to become finite in one way or another?

Dr. Tillich: I believe that I *feel,* at least, what you mean. It implies our next step, namely, the embodiment of the ultimate concern, which is always in finite realities. Jesus was a finite reality. Buddha was a finite reality. But through them ultimacy shone. Which can even happen through a mother! (Now I praise the mother after having disparaged her.) And it can happen through a child, or a flower, or a mountain. It has happened to me innumerable times through the ocean. It is not the ocean in its empirical reality, but its transparency to the infinite, that makes it great.

So I would say that your question leads immediately to the second concept of religion, namely, to the concrete embodiment, which is always something finite. Our question is really: Does the ultimate shine through the finite embodiment or not? If not, it becomes an idol.

Socialism, Communism, Nationalism, Fascism

Student: When you discussed ultimate concern, you said that you would exclude anything that has to do with the finite. And yet, from reading your books I get the impression that you would consider socialism and nationalism a legitimate objects of ultimate concern, though you exclude Communism and Fascism as demonizations. I don’t clearly understand the distinctions.

Dr. Tillich: Well, let us return to what was said before about the embodiment of ultimate concern. For instance if we take socialism, humanism, and nationalism (the three I mentioned) as ultimate concerns of large historical importance, then we can only answer: If they are *really* ultimate they become demonized; if, on the other hand, they are kept as manifestations of the ultimate and remain "transparent, then they are proper or acceptable, ethically speaking. I would say the same of all dogmas, rituals, and ethics of particular religions.

But I was referring earlier to the demonic forms socialism took on under Stalin, for instance, and nationalism’s demonic form under Hitler and Mussolini. Now these I would say are similar to the demonic forms which characterized the church of the Inquisition and, in the case of Protestantism, the "Church of the Absolutism of the Dogma." These distortions led inevitably to the same sort of destruction as occurred with socialism and nationalism. We need only study the history of the Thirty Years’ War to see the whole history of the Sixteenth-century religious wars in France between the Catholics and the Huguenots. Here we discover a demonic destructiveness of which the religions proper were guilty quite as much as the quasi-religions. This, I hope,

explains my distinction between nationalism and Fascism, and between Socialism and Communism.

Professor: Dr. Tillich, are you saying that nationalism, the nation as the motherland, is a legitimate symbol of the divine — if we want to use that term — so long as we see through it and beyond it?

Dr. Tillich: Yes, exactly.

Professor: But the moment we forget that it is on a symbol or a manifestation, and begin to worship it for itself it becomes idolatry, becomes demonic?

Dr. Tillich: Exactly.

Professor: Does this answer your last question?

Student: No, I think it is still not clear. As I see socialism and nationalism, I can't find anything infinite about them. They seem to me always to concern themselves with finite things.

Dr. Tillich: They do; but with other things, too. I was a "religious socialist" in my post-World-War-I period in Germany. At this time of my life I tried to show how in the socialist idea a secularized but nonetheless very powerful impression of the Christian symbol of the Kingdom of God could be present. But distortion crept into actual socialism; it became secularized and profaned. In Communism it became demonized. As I said before, there are always those two possibilities. What we tried to do at that time was to keep alive the religious background of socialism, as you have also done in American liberal humanism, where the religious evaluation of the Constitution belongs not so much to nationalism as to humanism. If the American Constitution should become the absolute of the American way of life, it will become politically demonized. Again if science, for example, should become the *only* way in which the human spirit can express itself, then science, which *is* a way of knowing God, through the atom and so on, will become a demonized form, separating us from the divine. There are always these possibilities, and the academic work we attempt here is to learn to make such distinctions. If we fail to make them, we cannot help but remain in the realm of popular talk, which is mostly popular nonsense. To forestall such a failure is one of the purposes of a seminar like this.

Student: I can see how someone with a Christian background could give socialism an infinite significance, but the socialists in Europe seem to disregard any absolute code of morals or ethics and deal only with what is pragmatic, with what is in the world today, but they still call themselves socialists.

Dr. Tillich: Yes, of course. I believe that they have become distorted, like the distorted or profanized followers of religion who, for instance, make it a matter of weekly Sunday service to

go to church — period! — a social act by which they meet the good people, the people on the right side of the tracks. This kind of distortion in Western Protestant churches is just as bad as the distortions in socialism, namely, a secularization despite the preservation of the fundamental forms. Should you study the history of socialism, however, how it came into existence, and where it was most truly represented, you will find several other similar examples. And I would say the same about nationalism.

The Origin of Quasi-Religions

Student: Are quasi-religions passing phenomena which characterize the age but are incidental to its historical development?

Dr. Tillich: I really must answer this question, because it is very interesting. How do quasi-religions come into existence? In the lectures I have often given on the history of man's self-interpretation in the Western world, especially at Harvard, and in my very first lectures in Berlin in 1919, I raised the question: What is the reason for the fact that we have a secular world? This is important, because quasi-religions arise on the basis of secularism.

Now I believe that the rise of an outspoken secularism has occurred only twice in world history. Fully developed autonomous cultures have twice arisen in which the ultimate concern was no longer expressed in religious symbols, in the sense of religions proper, with gods and churches or religious groups and mysteries. Philosophy took over the symbolization of the ultimate; ethics replaced the ritual and liturgical world; and social groups replaced the religious communities. It occurred first in the ancient world, beginning with the autonomous rise of Greek philosophy, which criticized the traditional symbols of religion, and with the Greek tragedies, which criticized the figures of the gods. This criticism proceeded to a point of secularization which was perhaps fully reached in the Greek philosophical development around 100 B.C., in the Epicurean, Stoic, and Skeptical schools. And after this process, religion returned.

It is fantastic to see how, in the late ancient world from 100 B.C. on, religion came back. I have often demonstrated this fact by way of art. The archaic style, which had disappeared with the coming of autonomous art and autonomous philosophy in Greek history, now returned. I distinguish — probably impossible in English, but quite possible in German — between the "archaic" and the "archaistic" periods of their art. The archaic continued up to the moment when the classical period arose, in Athens especially; and the archaistic period began at about the same time as the beginning of the rebirth of religion. When Mrs. Tillich and I were first in Rome, it was one of our greatest experiences to see this archaistic style in the art of the period from 100 B.C. to the beginning of fully developed Byzantine culture. They tried to imitate the archaic gods and goddesses of the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. And sometimes for us, who were not art historians — at least I was not, though Mrs. Tillich is to a certain extent — it was hard to distinguish the originals from the imitations.

In any case, here we have an example of an autonomous secular culture that bloomed and then became theonomous again (the word "theonomous" means here "filled with religious substance"). In the autonomous period, autonomous philosophy, autonomous ethics, and autonomous politics developed ("autonomous" is derived from *autos*, meaning "self," and *nomos*, meaning "law"). Being its own law, the culture followed the law of logic, the law of its ethical and political experience. Then the theonomous period emerged again in the later ancient world, and Christianity entered a development which already represented a *return* of religious elements. This first period of full autonomy, and thus of secularism, was therefore very short.

Theonomy endured then for a thousand years. But when this theonomy was threatened by the various renaissances of the middle and later Middle Ages, it became "heteronomy."[2] What I call the "church of the Inquisition" is another word for the heteronomous church. It exists everywhere in churches which become defensive and then oppressive. And finally, in opposition to the oppressive church a new autonomy was born, for which we have the terms "Renaissance," "Enlightenment," and "naturalism," and then followed the secularization of the "Kingdom of God" idea into socialism, Communism, and other revolutionary movements, or quasi-religions. And so now I have answered your question with a very wide view of history, but it seemed to be necessary.

Student: I have just one other question that I would like to ask. Would it be possible then to say that a quasi-religion could never be really self-destructive because it represents a phase in man’s progress toward the eternal, toward the ground of his being?

Dr. Tillich: No, I would not say so. A quasi-religion can become one of two things. It can actually become self-destructive if it imitates the defensive heteronomous forms of religion or the self-adoration of, let us say, the Roman Empire. That is one possibility. The other, which is more usual, is that the secularism itself becomes empty. And that is what I mean by profanization. It loses the substance it inherited in the beginning from the religious period, from the archaic tradition. It loses it and becomes entirely empty. This period of emptiness may be seen very clearly in the ancient world, and its sharpest expression is the development of Skepticism. But Skepticism provoked a countermovement. And this countermovement I call the religious period, when the Stoics suddenly became religious and adopted Platonic religious ideas. And the Platonic school itself suddenly became mystical or Neoplatonic. That was the religious reaction.

Today we ourselves are in a period in which our secularism can provoke either complete emptiness or demonic, destructive distortions of quasi-religions. We have seen the youth of Europe run to Fascism singing its praises and glorifying it saying, "Now we have found the meaning of life." Their secular world failed to give them any meaning, and the religious powers were weak and did not help. So they were ripe for these quasi-religions. But that is another subject for a whole seminar!

Are the Secular Religions Empty?

Student: I am not clear as to your statements on the secular religions. Do you consider the secular religions to be empty, not giving man the true meaning of his life? Is that why they become demonic?

Dr. Tillich: Now, you see, you cannot say such things! The secular religions, like the proper religions, are open to many developments. They can be very solid expressions of ultimate concern in secular language. That is, they *can* be this as long as a religious substance remains effective in them despite the secularization, or as long as the ultimate concern or "infinite passion" is still in them and shines through them.

Take a man like Plato: he was not a follower of the Olympian gods, he was far beyond them. But the religious period which followed the Homeric period (a reform period) still influenced him. So it was possible for him to become a secular philosopher, but with innumerable philosophical insights pointing in every direction, so irrevocably that our whole Western culture remains dependent on him whether we like it or not. At the same time, in every dialogue he asked the question of the meaning of life. He is the typical expression of what I would call the classical moment in history, if we may use the word for one special period, as we usually do for classical art. For in Plato the substance of the archaic tradition remained, but already expressed in rational terms, in terms of a very rational and very elaborate philosophy. We know that Plato was the predecessor of modern mathematical science, together with the Pythagoreans with whom we work today.

Now there are other possibilities open to us. If a wasteland slowly develops, the religious substance is increasingly lost to the power of rational form. I can demonstrate this also very well in the visual arts. After the classical gods or goddesses, we have beautiful women. And in the end of the realistic period we even have prostitute types, with the names of goddesses, which express the extreme emptiness of the situation. Then the reaction produces a new archaism, as I said before. In philosophy we see emptiness in the form of a degeneration into mere scientism, which does not have the power to give answers to the people of the period — to the problem of the meaning of their lives — although earlier the Priest or priestess of Delphi was certainly very influential among them, as we can see from the relationship of Socrates to Delphi. He marked the beginning of autonomous criticism in philosophy, and nevertheless was the wisest of all men, as the Delphic oracle told him. These are wonderful historical nuances to contemplate.

A question, therefore, such as you have just asked — "Are secular religions empty?" — cannot be answered. We can only say that in the process of historical development certain stages appear. And we have to ask, "Where are we at present in all this?" I believe we are perhaps in the archaistic stage — not the archaic, but the archaistic. We look longingly back to the time of power of our religion. Thus we recognize the appeal of sectarian movements and the tremendous success of fundamentalism and of the Roman church, and so on. But we are all at the same time

going through this secularism whether we like it or not, because the daily work going on here on this campus and elsewhere is based on the secularism of the Western world, stemming from the Renaissance. We cannot escape it. And we have to fight to avoid falling under wrong absolutisms, which I call demonizations, and to avoid simply swimming along the popular ways of life into increasing profanization and secularization and thus to an emptying of our culture.

Are the Quasi-Religions Necessary?

Student: I would like to return for a moment to the discussion on quasi-religion and put it on an individual level, rather than on a group or sociological level. Would you say that concern with the ultimate involves, during its development in the individual, an acceptance of some form of quasi-religion?

Dr. Tillich: As an individual I am strongly attached to the quasi-religion of liberal humanistic tradition, which is somehow politically expressed in the American Constitution and philosophically expressed in the United States by people like William James or Whitehead. In Europe it was expressed in earlier people like the German classical philosophers and their critics, Nietzsche and others. So now we all stand in this tradition. I hope that, steeped as I am in it, I likewise participate actively in it. On the other hand, I am also of the Christian tradition, of the New Testament tradition, of the tradition of my great teacher Rudolf Bultmann;[3] and I am a product of the nineteenth century, which still taught me when I attended the university from 1904 to 1907. These traditions are equally strong, and a part of them I share with people like Luther and especially Augustine.

Now let us examine this liberal humanist tradition, which we need neither deny nor affirm, since we are part of it. The word liberal means here autonomous thought and action, not subjected heteronomously to either Fascism or Communism. In this sense I am free. But I try to avoid, as I did as a religious socialist, falling into the process of emptying the liberal humanist ideas of their original religious content. I always go back to the religious source that underlies them, for there is no such thing as humanism in the abstract anywhere. Humanism is always based on a religious tradition. Let us again use Plato as an example. I would say that Plato’s greatness lies in the fact he represents Apollonian and Dionysiac humanism in the highest form of unity.[4] The religious background of Apollo and Dionysus shines through every one of his dialogues — the Apollonian more in the early and late dialogues, and the Dionysiac mystical aspects more in the middle dialogues. In the Western world since the victory of Christianity, we have a humanism which is always Christian humanism, even if we act as much as possible like anti-Christians, There was probably nobody more openly anti-Christian than Nietzsche. But he was not only the son of a Protestant minister but confessed of himself that "the blood of the priests" was still in him. In his *Zarathustra* we find this "blood" in almost every word. *Zarathustra* is a religious prophecy, but a prophecy with a distorted Christianity in mind, a sentimentalized Christianity.

I would say therefore that, yes, we are involved as individuals in some form of quasi-religion.

We cannot deny the fact that we are humanists or socialists or nationalists. We must affirm it, but also protect it against demonization and secularization. And that is my effort throughout my theology.

Student: Dr. Tillich, why do you feel that quasi-religions have always proved themselves inadequate to overcome the sense of separation and estrangement man has?

Dr. Tillich: Because they grow out of a victorious secularism. Now, secularism means turning toward the cultural productions of the finite. And in doing so, in producing philosophy, sciences, and politics independent of their religious source, these quasi-religions lose their relationship to the ultimate sources of meaning. Consequently they become empty. And every empty space provokes or invites other forces to enter into it. These are usually demonic or destructive forces. But if not, then they are forces of grace. Those are the two possibilities.

Therefore your question is absolutely justified. The danger of quasi-religions, the element of danger in them, is the potential emptiness, the loss of ultimate meaning, because of the turning of the mind toward the production of cultural goods in autonomous ways — autonomous, again, in the sense of following the independent forms of these various cultural ideas (aesthetic, logical, ethical, political), and thus losing the religious substance which underlies all of them at the point of their highest creativity.

The danger of religions is different. Generally speaking, I would say that the danger of the quasi-religions tends more toward profanization, in the sense of emptiness. Whereas the danger of the religions proper is more that of demonization, in the sense of identifying the revelatory experiences on which they are based with the divine itself, and therefore usurping the "throne of the divine" for themselves. Between these two dangers we have to grope our way.

Religion and Art

Student: I take it that in your theology you feel that, while our symbols and our myths play a very active secular role, they should be playing a more active role in relation to religion, that they need a revitalization. Can this be done outside of the church itself? Can it be done in contemporary literature or in contemporary art?

Dr. Tillich: Now this is a very interesting question. I would like very much to go into this, although it might lead us, again, into another seminar of twenty hours! I believe that something of this revitalization has already occurred — probably more by poetry, drama, and literature than through the visual arts. You see, the visual arts lack the "word"; and the religions are, in Christianity especially and in Protestantism even more, bound to the "word." Religion has had a very questionable relationship to the visual arts. Now, as you have perhaps already noticed, my own personal preference is for the visual arts. But this is one of the points where I am not considered fully Protestant, but rather "Catholicistic." Nevertheless, I would say that in some

works of literature and in the visual arts, we already have possibilities for interpreting the Christian symbols in a way which is not only philosophical — something I do as a theologian — but which has in itself the other side of symbolism, the artistic. I would not be able to name those in English literature, except contemporaries like T. S. Eliot, who have done anything in this respect. But I know there are others.

With regard to the visual arts, I believe that the whole development since 1900 — since Cezanne — has done a great deal to liberate our understanding of Christianity from what I call "beautifying realism," for which the German language has the wonderful word Kitsch. Such art does not express anything; it is simply a superficial prettifying where beauty as such is not called for, but rather expressive power. And I think that German Expressionism, for example, has done a great deal to show us this.

So far as my own thinking and preaching are concerned — especially preaching, which is more important ultimately than theology — I have found that my relationship to the visual arts and to drama and poetry and the novel has made it possible for me to offer fresh interpretations of the Christian symbols. Therefore I believe that your question deserves a very positive answer. But we must be careful about one thing: we should not confuse the artistic symbolization of religious symbols with the religious symbols themselves, thus implying that art can replace religion. That indeed would distort your statement.

Reform or Retreat

Student: What is the relationship between external and internal discord in the religious life of the individual?

Dr. Tillich: When the inner difficulties of the social structure produce dissatisfaction in individuals, revolutionary movements in religion or in politics may develop, as happened when the social and religious structure of the pre-Reformation period failed to satisfy large groups of people. Individuals who are especially sensitive to this situation give expression to dissatisfaction and produce new social or religious forms. That is one way in which the two are related — the internal and the external. It is also possible that the individual may withdraw from the whole social situation in which he lives, and either return to earlier forms that still have power or anticipate something new without giving revolutionary expression to it. These are the people in the New Testament who are called "those who are waiting for the salvation of Israel." They were also called "the quiet ones in the land." That is still another possibility. We may choose. Every period has in itself, because of the whole stream of human history, not only negative elements but also positive ones. We can concentrate on these positive elements in order to find the meaning of life for ourselves in spite of the disintegrating social situation, or we can find that meaning in fighting against the disintegration. If we fight, either we founder because the response is not yet strong enough or we produce some kind of reformation (and there are many reformations in the Christian church, not merely the Protestant one). Or, we may simply

become cynical and have a good time, repressing the ultimate question so far as possible. And that is the only completely unproductive possibility.

NOTES:

1. "From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief Priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. 22, Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. 23, But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."

2. From "heteronomous," not self-governing.

3. For Tillich's comments on Rudolph Bultmann, see his *Systematic Theology*, II, 102, 106.

4. Apollonian humanism is understood as intellectually centered, while the Dionysiac is emotional or mystical.

return to religion-online

Ultimate Concern - Tillich in Dialogue by D. Mackenzie Brown

Donald Mackenzie Brown is Chairman of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of California in Santa Barbara. This book was published in 1965 by Harper & Row, Publishers. This book was prepared for Religion Online by Harry W. and Grace C. Adams.

Third Dialogue

Professor: At our first meeting we discussed theological principles as they have been expressed and interpreted by Paul Tillich. Our second meeting was an inquiry into the nature of the quasi-religions, their secular basis, and their relation to the religions proper. These quasi-religions, again, are humanism, nationalism, and socialism, with their extreme forms, scientism, Fascism, and Communism. Tonight our chief topic is nationalism as a quasi-religion, and its influence on religions proper since the Renaissance and the Reformation.

We ought now to proceed with our discussion of this theme, but, as happened at our last meeting, some questions have been raised concerning previous arguments which indicate that we are not yet agreed on basic premises. Much of the disagreement arises because of conflict between the interpretations given by Dr. Tillich and some of the more traditional ideas with which you have been familiar. I have here a series of questions from one student which demonstrate a serious consideration of what we are attempting. But this student completely and absolutely disagrees with just about everything you have said, Dr. Tillich. I think before we go further, in fairness to the questioner and to the seminar, we should consider his objections.

The Term "God"

First of all, your critic writes: In what sense is God indefinable? It was said that God was the ground of all being, and that God is prior to the world. In that case God must be indefinable in the sense of having no boundaries or limits, having no fixed outline or character. It is a contradiction to say that characteristics have no character. Perhaps you will say simply, "God is limitless." I will have to reply, "I don’t know what you mean."

Dr. Tillich: Now it is obviously difficult to answer this without the preceding argument, because in our discussion the word God was not used at all as a basic word. We used, instead, the words "ultimate concern" or "ultimate reality," or "ground of being," or something like that. And then

we said that this was expressed in different ways. For some it is a theistic concept of God. Others deny that concept and are nevertheless considered proponents of proper religion, as in Buddhism. Others hold to such philosophies as humanism which are not strictly religions, but have the character of ultimate concern. So we cannot start this kind of discussion, as you have done, with any concept of God and then state that God is indefinable. Where we use symbolic terms like "ground of being" we mean that we experience something which is an object of our ultimate concern, which underlies everything that is, is its creative ground or its formative unity, and cannot be defined beyond these negative terms.

But negative definitions are nevertheless definitions, for they remove the wrong connotations of finite definitions. And on the other hand these negative statements imply, always in relation to a positive statement, that this same ground of being is not this or that, yet is at the same time all this finite world in so far as it is its "ground." We speak about what is our ultimate concern in the language of traditional religions, in positive statements referring to the "highest," the "divine," the "good," the "true," and so on. But such statements must be deprived of the finite connotations they have in our ordinary language. Now to say that these statements are really meaningless is possible only if one has no personal experience in the power of ultimate concern or of something unconditiona1and infinite to which he belongs. If one has consciously had this experience at any time — or, in quite different terminology, the experience of the unconditionally serious, or the holy — then he understands that the attempt to speak about it is an attempt to say Yes and No at the same time.

Professor: In other words, mind and definition can only point to it, but without actual experience it is not possible really to . . .

Dr. Tillich: No, it is not possible! It is the same as with color, or a concept like beauty. Although we can point to it, we can never define a color. Without the experience of redness, for instance, we cannot define red. But if we have experienced it we can put it into the context of other colors, or can describe its wave lengths, and so forth. Otherwise, all speaking about redness is, of course, meaningless. The same thing is true with respect to art or music, the aesthetic experience. If we lack it — and some people assert that they have had no actual experience of what music is, so that it is for them a noise — all that we may say about music is lost on them. Now an incapacity for musical experience may possibly exist among some individuals, but I am absolutely certain that the lack of experience of something ultimately important or serious does not exist in any human being. Therefore it must be possible to show anyone, in some way at least, what ultimacy means.

Being and Existence

Professor: Then perhaps you have already answered the student’s second question: "Nor do I understand what it means to be the ‘ground of all being.’ The word ‘being’ is itself so confusing that I would prefer to substitute the word ‘existence.’ And I know only existence, not any

ground or foundation for it. Nor would I say that there is any need for any such ground."

Dr. Tillich: Yes — now, the word "need" in itself has, if it claims to be a true statement, a "ground" character, an ultimate character. What does "need" mean here? Implied already in the word is the acknowledgment of something which is usually called truth. Analysis would show that this is not a thing beside other things, but an ultimate quality of judgment, a characteristic of reality which is grasped in this judgment.

Another point raised by the questioner concerns the words "being" and "existence." "Existence" is a most unrefined alternative to the word "being," because it omits the potentialities of existence which we usually call the essences of things. And they have being, too; they are the power of being, which may become beings. For instance, even if suddenly a scourge should cause all trees to disappear, the tree, or the power of becoming a tree, would still be there; and given the right conditions, living trees might come into existence again. Here you have a clear differentiation between essence and existence, which are two types of being. And then there is of course that being which is beyond essence and existence, which, in the tradition of the classical theology of all centuries, we call God — or, if you prefer, "being itself" or "ground of being." And this "being" does not merely exist and is not merely essential but transcends that differentiation, which otherwise belongs to everything finite.

Professor: If we consider, then, that "being" is a better over-all term than "existence," since existence by definition comes out of something, why is it necessary to go beyond the term being, which is a broad inclusive term and include both the essence and the existence that has emerged? Why is it necessary to talk about a ground of being?

Dr. Tillich: It is not necessary. I would prefer to say "being itself." But I know that this term is even more disliked. And so I speak of the ground of being. I actually mean, with the classical theologians, being itself.

Professor: And you don’t use "being itself" because it has not found a place in our modern terminology? In any case, we are actually trying to reach that which has no conditions and no finite qualities.

Dr. Tillich: Yes, and we need a term in which a bit of the metaphorical element is still preserved. "Ground" is of course a metaphor. And it is a metaphor which actually points to the idea of creation, to the symbol of creation. I have used this term, now so frequently used in present-day theological discussions, because it has both logical and metaphorical power. However, if I were able to go back to the classical scholastic term *esse ipsum*, I would prefer that.

Professor: Being itself?

Dr. Tillich: Yes.

Love and Self-Love

Professor: Then we come to our final question from this same student. This again may have already been answered. "Since I do not understand the concept of a ground of being, I do not understand separation from it. I feel no such separation. Nor do I understand love as a drive to end this separation — love defined as the drive to unite what has been separated. The only way I can understand separation is in the fact that I am not that, and that that is not me. If I love a person, we are still not each other, and there is no desire to change this."

Dr. Tillich: Yes, now, there is a great deal to be said about this. It is a very interesting statement, and I understand the criticism of this student, although he does not understand what he criticizes. I know that behind these concepts lies a great amount of consideration and decision with respect to the whole history of philosophy and the present situation in theology and religion.

Now let me offer for this love-and-reunion idea a thesis I have developed — not in theological but in philosophic thought. I used as examples, I believe, Hegel and William James and Nietzsche. The concepts from which this idea of love finally grew in my mind are fragmentary in Hegel's early writings. His fragment on love is one of the greatest contributions to the philosophy of love, although he wrote it long before his *Phenomenology of the Mind.* But this fragment is, so to speak, the blood that courses through his whole system, his "estrangement and reconciliation," or the more formalized "antithesis and synthesis." Hegel was a philosopher of love before he put into logical terms the movement of love, the going out and returning. Now we must not speak of "strangers," namely, God and man as strangers, or man and man as strangers, but rather of estrangement. Estrangement always implies a fundamental belongingness, and therefore an inner drive toward reunion. The stranger, on the other hand, is only accidentally related to me, and he might or might not become my friend or enemy. In any case, this difference between stranger and estrangement is a very fundamental idea.

Now, I define the concept of love as the urge to reunite the separated. And there are at least four different qualities of love which must be clearly distinguished, but all of them share in common a desire to be united with something that is not strange but separated. Thus, you see, separation implies belonging. If this concept is applied to God, we can understand the fundamental distinction between two theologies — the theology of the stranger, which makes God an individual somewhere in the air, or beyond the air, who might or might not be related to us; and the theology of estrangement, which insists that "from him and through him, and to him are all things," to use the Paulinian phrase. This means we are related to him, and are determined to return to him because we come from him. The stranger, on the other hand, may be a tyrant who can force us to do something.

The whole ethical problem is immediately implied by this distinction. For me, as I explained, the true ethical principle is the reconciliation with one's own being. It is not the acceptance of a strange command from outside, whether conventional or human or divine, but the command of our true being, from which we are estranged and in this sense separated. And in every morally positive act there is a reunion. Therefore, I agree with what was said by Erich Fromm, with whom I often disagree, in a small article he wrote twenty or thirty years ago about "self-love," that self-love is clearly *necessary.* And if this self-love does not exist, we become "selfish," because selfishness and disgust toward oneself are one and the same thing. But the right self-love is self-affirmation, in the sense in which God sees us, or the sense in which we are essentially created. And this leads us back to the initial ideas of estrangement and reconciliation. This is my answer to the third question.

Professor: God then is our true being?

Dr. Tillich: I would not formulate it like that, but of course our true being is rooted in the divine ground. As classical theology expressed it, every universal essence and also the essence of every individual human being is in the divine, or — in theological language — "in the mind of God." Of course, "in the mind of God" means "in God," for God does not have a special mind which is not he himself as a whole. In this sense I agree with you.

Finite and Infinite

Professor: That gives us one final question before we proceed to today's topic. It comes from another student. "What is the basis for the assertion that one's ultimate concern — and you have defined faith as ultimate concern — is toward something that is not finite? What is the qualitative difference between finite and infinite subject matter in terms of experience? Why must ultimate concern be concern with something that is not finite?"

Dr. Tillich: Yes, now, the question "Why *must* or *should* ultimate concern be related to something ultimate and not finite?" is almost a tautology. And the experiential difference between the finite and the infinite, or the conditional and the unconditional, leads us back to the very first point of the experience of something infinite or unconditional to which we belong. In the moment in which we experience the unconditional validity of the moral imperative, whatever its content may be — the moment in which we say, "We have to do this, at whatever cost"— we experience something unconditional.

Professor: In that sense, infinite, unconditional, and ultimate all mean the same?

Dr. Tillich: Yes, although they vary in their origin. For instance, I would speak of "infinite passion" with Kierkegaard. Although I would not speak of "unconditional passion" or "infinite interest," I certainly would speak of "unconditional imperative" in the Kantian sense of the

term. And I would say "ultimate concern" in order to compare it with the preliminary concerns that ordinarily fill our life. These are nuances according to the context in which the words are used.

Professor: And what you have been saying is that every one of us has a relation to God, in the sense that sooner or later everyone must have a concern which is unconditional, or ultimate, or infinite. One cannot go through his entire life concerned only with this finite thing and that finite thing, because there is something underneath all these finite manifestations which is their ground or source.

Dr. Tillich: Yes. But I would not say that one must necessarily recognize this in the end. I would insist that one always has something (of which one is often not conscious) that he takes with unconditional seriousness.

Professor: And that is God?

Dr. Tillich: Oh, you may call it God, or even science, or the mother, or the nation. But these last are deifications or idolatry.

Professor: Now, when do you not have idolatry?

Dr. Tillich: When the concern is with God who is really God. And here, of course, we face the old problem of what I call "the fight of religion against religion," the continuous fight against the idolatrous deterioration of religion.

Professor: Is there any way of telling "the God that is really God" except by experience, intuitive experience? Is there any way of distinguishing him intellectually?

Dr. Tillich: Something can easily be proved negatively — by demonstrating in the cases I have mentioned, and in the cases we must discuss tonight, namely nations, what a finite concern is. These concerns cannot be ultimate because they are transitory in their very character, and not merely quantitatively transitory but also qualitatively, in meaning and in their systems of value.

Professor: So ultimate concern must pertain to something that is not transitory? Can one recognize it when he finds it? Does the individual know when he has found it?

Dr. Tillich: Often not. Otherwise idolatry perhaps would not occur. But judgment of idolatry is the function of the prophet and the mystic. I think of these two together here. They have to show to us where it is that we have gone astray into idolatry by giving to our concern, even if we call it God, qualities that make it finite. This is what happened when God was "brought down" to become a particular friend of Israel; and then the prophets severed that relationship

and restored the unconditional nature of Old Testament religion.

Professor: Would you conclude, then, that everyone has encountered God in the sense of having encountered that which is not limited in time — which is not temporary — although not all have recognized it as such?

Dr. Tillich: You may say that, yes.

Professor: Is there a final question before we proceed?

Student: The first day you threw out a term which I didn't quite understand. You talked about the "God beyond God." I didn't understand that at all.

Dr. Tillich: Where were you when I talked about it? It was the second day. Now I do not really need to say anything new, after all this discussion, because that is precisely what I have been speaking about the whole time. If you add to it what my writing adds — "God above the God of theism" — the term may be clear to you, since "the God of theism" is God limited by man's finite conceptions.

Power and Vocation

Professor: We are now ready for tonight's topic: nationalism.

Student: Would you like us to give a summary of what we have determined to be Dr. Tillich's position on the subject as revealed in his writings?

Professor: How long is your summary of his position?

Student: Probably three to five minutes.

Professor: Very good. Dr. Tillich, they are going to summarize all that you say about nationalism and perhaps other quasi-religions in three to five minutes.

Student: Basically, these are what we found to be the salient points: In the quasi-religion of nationalism, ultimate concern is directed toward the nation. In all nationalism there are two elements. First, there is a natural self-affirmation of the power to exist as an independent entity. This power element must exist in every nation. It is never lacking. The second element is the consciousness of having a vocation, in the sense of representing some principle of ultimate significance.

Professor: What does "vocation" mean?

Student: Vocation, in this sense, refers to the effort or capacity of representing to the world a principle of ultimate significance. For America it would probably be the democratic ideal of freedom. For Russia, a vocational element would be the establishment of the ideal Communist state.

Professor: You mean the spirit of freedom, the spirit of Communism?

Dr. Tillich: No! Now may I answer this? I could give examples from the Greek consciousness as expressed in Aristotle's *Politics.* The concept of Greece as the center between north, south, east, and west, the country in which the surrounding barbarism is overcome, is the vocation of the Greeks. The Romans expressed their vocation more clearly, namely, that they were the nation of law. And they felt that they had the right to rule, because they brought law to the Mediterranean world, to the entire world as it was known at that time. Vocation is theologically most obvious in Judaism, where the concept of the "elected" or "selected" nation was established when it became the vocation of Abraham to be the father of that large nation through which all others were blessed. We could then point to the example of the vocation of medieval Germany as the representative of the *Corpus Christianum*, the Christian body in which both the religious and the secular were united. Again, take the self-consciousness of France, which, after having died out in the last fifty years, now renews itself in her determination to represent the highest cultural functions. Very important also is the British vocation, which was the gathering of all nations everywhere into a kind of Christian humanism. Russia saw herself traditionally as the salvation of the deteriorated Western world, first by what was done through the Slavophile movement in the nineteenth century and later by the Communists, who did not act on any Christian basis, but because they also thought they could save the deteriorated Western world.

I can also give some counterexamples, namely Italy and Germany in the late nineteenth centuries, who were motivated more by power than vocation. Germany especially felt no true vocational consciousness under Hitler; she was conscious only of power. Germany was destined for catastrophe, because the lack of a history, a culture, the absence of a founded vocational consciousness, left an empty space. And then Hitler could impose on her the fantastic idea of blood and soil, and of Nordic race, and other nonsense which of course was ridiculed by the best German minds, although they failed to understand that it was not only ridiculous but also revealed the outlook of a disintegrating lower-middle class, capable then of producing Nazism. So vocation is a very important concept. In my acceptance speech, when I received the Peace Prize in Germany, I discussed it very seriously. And the Germans, to my great astonishment, accepted it. A vocational consciousness, however, was certainly lacking in the Bismarckian and Hitler eras.

Student: To continue our analysis, then, you have from the two elements of power and vocation the greatest danger and the basic problem of nationalism. The factor out of which the quasi-

religious element of nationalism arises is the tension between these power and vocational aspects of national life. Dr. Tillich states that a union of these two elements makes the quasi-religious nature of nationalism possible. Fascism, probably the most extreme example of nationalism in the world, involves, like any other extreme nationalism, a denial of the finitude of the nation and likewise of the ambiguities, distortions, and evils of the system. This denial of the finitude of the nation gives rise to severe suppression of criticism and deviating opinions, and consequently to wholesale murder.

With respect to the nature of the encounter of the religious proper with nationalism, a narrowing takes place in the religion proper as it tries to defend itself against the invading ideology. The degree of susceptibility of any true religion is a function of what Dr. Tillich refers to as the fragility of that religion. Spiritual Protestantism and liberal humanism he characterizes as fragile forms of religion, because of the "dialectical" nature of their contact with such ideologies as nationalism. This makes them more fragile, and consequently more subject to invasion by foreign forces, than the more dogmatic religions such as Catholicism. Do you agree with this summary, Dr. Tillich?

Dr. Tillich: I agree. It is a bit sketchy, but it is absolutely correct.

Student: Well, then we can continue with the questions that occurred to us as we worked on this problem of nationalism. We came up with four important questions. The first of these is as follows: According to Dr. Tillich (and I quote), "If the national consciousness is humanized and becomes aware both of its own finite validity and the infinite significance of what it represents, even though ambiguously, a nation can become a representative of the supranational unity of mankind, which is in religious language the Kingdom of God."[1] Now our question is: Has there ever been, or could there ever be, a case where these ideal conditions exist in history? In other words, is this more than just a theoretical consideration?

Dr. Tillich: I agree with you that it’s an essentialist consideration. I mean, this is in the structure of essential truth or the essential structure of things as they are created, and theoretically should therefore be a right description. In actual existence the nation, along with every existing thing, is distorted. And if you ask me to give an example of ideal conditions, I would have to confess that a fully adequate example cannot be cited. Of course not. But approximations can be found. I would say, so far as I see, that the United States now approaches the ideal. And I speak as one who has come from outside, and is therefore probably not very susceptible to an inborn nationalism. I would say the United States has achieved this sense of the unity of mankind to a greater extent than many other nations.

I would add, at the same time, that pre-Bismarckian Germany showed some traits of this. It was continually attacked, but it counterattacked very little. This of course led to a lack of centralized power, and the emperor remained only a figurehead for a long time.

I would also praise England for the way in which, in the nineteenth century, she mediated among divisive forces in the world, although always in self-interest. This we should not forget. It is the power interest, and we should not call it necessarily bad, since otherwise a nation is open, like Germany before the Bismarck era, to attacks from all sides and to disintegration from within. That has been the fate of Germany ever since the Thirty Years' War, and probably even earlier.

These are examples to instruct us in the idea of approximation. This idea is necessary as a criterion by which to judge existing conditions. If you accuse me of idealism I would answer that, if idealism concerns itself with finding the essential structure of reality, then I am an idealist; and probably you also, if you attempt to form judgments at all. Otherwise, we must call ourselves positivists. But the very moment in which we make a judgment about anything we are, at least then, "essentialist." "Essentialist" is probably a better word today than "idealist," because the word idealist has accumulated connotations which made it almost as bad as "Communist" or "criminal." I therefore try to avoid it. You will not find it often in my writing, unless by mistake.

Professor: Do you know anybody who is not an idealist or an essentialist in some way?

Dr. Tillich: Many of the existentialists of today try to avoid any essentialist element. Of course they cannot, because if they were to succeed in avoiding it completely, they must remain mute; they could no longer speak. Since every word expresses a universal, the radical existentialist is an illusion. The position is logically impossible, but a practical approximation can be widely applied. The danger of historical positivism, which in some forms is very close to existentialism, is that it lacks any way of judging history. The radical positivist cannot judge history — cannot, if he is consistent, judge even the inner situation of his own nation, or the evils of its political system. He is obliged simply to say, "There they are." The moment in which the positivist steps beyond this statement he becomes an essentialist. He has, after all, some idea of what is wholesome for mankind. Soberly materialistic as his position may be, the materialist is also an essentialist. Only the positivist tries to avoid essentialism of any kind. And he of course cannot. I have yet to meet a positivist who does not make judgments — moral judgments, ethical or social judgments, or judgments concerning what is true or false. And when he does, he immediately becomes more than a positivist. Forgive this "essentialist" digression.

Student: We have a second question derived from the summary of Dr. Tillich's point of view on nationalism. First I'll quote from him again. "The basic problem of nationalism is the tension between the power and vocational elements in national life."[2] Our question is: In what way does a unification of these two elements produce the quasi-religious character of nationalism?Dr. Tillich: In the sense that Bismarck's Germany was not quasi-religious. It was simply a secular concentration of power. Having been born shortly after it was founded, I grew up in it. We felt strongly nationalistic and royalist and so forth, but the idea never crossed our minds that these

values could replace religion, or God, or the universal Christian church. Of course, we were taught that one must be ready to die for the fatherland; but the idea that the fatherland was a matter of ultimate concern was never suggested. There were the germs of it, however, particularly in the high schools and Gymnasiums. There the teachers had a very strong nationalistic bias, especially if they had no relationship to religion or Christianity, which was often the case in this period. In America when I first arrived, religion was still a widespread reality, though not always a very important one for all people. But in Germany the emptiness was already great. Now if an empty space exists, something always enters it. And the German people were already beginning to tend to fill the empty space of their lost religion with a new nationalist religion. There was a beginning, but as yet uncertain. Anti-Semitic movements existed, but not strongly. The Emperor himself was friendly with Jews, and there was no real problem at that time. Generally speaking, Germany under Wilhelm II was perhaps the most liberal of countries, not necessarily democratic, but liberal in the sense of allowing individual citizens innumerable liberties.

Then the real change took place in two stages. First came the German Republic and the alliance of the elements of ultranationalism with the upper classes, who wanted to use these elements in order to keep down the ruling democratic powers — the Social Democrats and the Center party. And out of this unholy alliance of the German upper classes, the old aristocrats and the upper bourgeoisie, with the lower-middle -classes in whom nationalistic ideas were strong, the Nazi movement finally developed.

In order to answer your question directly, I would say that a quasi-religion developed the very moment Hitler succeeded in giving this already present nationalism a positive and negative content — a double-sided myth. The positive side of the myth concerned the Nordic race and German blood and soil; and the negative side, the destruction of the demonic opponent of this deified German race, the Jews. Here was the possibility of building a quasi-religion with its own myth.

True, some other nations, according to the myth, although not equal to the Germanic race, were at least capable of high standing — as, for example, the British. (This proved a very important element in Hitler's miscalculations about Britain later in the war.) And still other nations were demonic or subhuman, such as the Poles, who were consequently so terribly mistreated in the war. And there was also the factor, ideologically, of the Jewish spirit, as embodied in Communism; that was the enemy. Some historical justification was felt for this, since Marx, after all, was a Jew, and the prophetic words in his *Communist Manifesto* remind one of the Jewish prophets in many respects. That, briefly, was the myth and thus the theology of this quasi-religion.

But more important than the myth of the vocation of Nazism was the will to use the entire German power to actualize it, to make this race the dominant saving race. This was the salvation myth. Individual people then came to believe in it with real ultimate concern. If you

want to know what ultimate concern is in a demonized form, in a demonic form, then you must look at the faces of the storm troopers. I am not thinking now of the atrocities — they were consequences — but of the totally different human type those faces represent. I am trying to compare, in imagination, four of these storm troopers as I knew them before my exile, in the early months of 1933 and in the months and years before that as they developed, with four of the students in front of me. But they cannot be compared! The troopers belonged to another human category: you felt the absolute strangeness in their completely mechanized and perfectly willing obedience, the fanaticism in everything they did. In some cases it reminded one of the early Jesuits, the complete transformation of men by Loyola's exercises, and their total subjection to the church. Now this type of human being represented the Nazi "church," the card-carrying members. Of course, most people went along with them, and the behavior of all those who did not belong to the inner group of the Nazi "church" is another whole story. But it was this inner group of the "church" who led the people and were the priests of this "church."

Professor: For the benefit of the Catholic members of the seminar, can you say something better about the early Jesuits?

Dr. Tillich: I *can* say that the two closest friends I have in this country are Jesuits, and that they are the only ones I have found here in the Catholic realm who are theologically "tops," as French and West German Catholics often are. And so we became friends, and still are in spite of all our differences. And I can assure you that one of these Jesuits in his writings has interpreted my theology better than you have, up to this point at least. But the early Jesuits in the Counter Reformation were really the "glorious" of the church, and they did exhibit that absolute obedience and breaking of the human will by tremendous disciplines.

Student: May I ask just one thing about this? What happens to the drive of love within the human being in this situation, in the storm trooper? Where does it go? Is it a sublimation or what?

Dr. Tillich: That is a very important question, and I often ask it myself. I think it all flows into the cause, and not into human beings. They were empty; they had no true cause whatsoever, neither religious nor any other. Now a pseudo-cause replaced everything, and that was the party, which was very small before it became all-powerful. It was a fighting group; and the group sacrificed. Love was taken away from human beings and cast into the party cause.

But that phenomenon also occurs in religion. We cannot deny that, when a religion becomes fanatical, love is diverted away from human beings toward the cause. Now a cause can imply various things. In Nazism it implied first of all the party. But the party was expressed in Hitler. Hitler became the mythological figure on which all passion was lavished; there was even a kind of *eros.* It is something we have often seen before. There are many stories about French soldiers, in the time of Napoleon's defeat, who still clung to him as the symbolic figure of the cause for which they had lived and died. And there the *eros* is not *philia!* Using the Greek

terms, we say that *philia*, the human-to-human relationship, was completely extinguished, but the *eros* was not. The *eros* passionately and fanatically poured into the cause.

Student: Haven't we a close parallel to that among our segregationists in the South?

Dr. Tillich: Yes, although I am not so clear about that. I may be wrong, but so far as I know, early segregationalism after the Civil War began when southerners felt attacked by the North. They had had a way of life; they defended this way of life. Now today, there are undoubtedly some groups among the segregationists, the Ku Klux Klan and others, which may be compared to our troopers. But I believe that the basic structure is different, because these fanatical groups result more from resisting a continuous attack upon them, ideologically, legally, and in all forms. And they resist. Nazism was different. It was, from the very beginning an aggressive movement. It was not a question of feeling threatened, but a small group with a particular ideology, determined to attack the society.

Rigidity and Fragility

Student: Our third question is this: Can we interpret your writings to mean that what we might call the doctrinal rigidity of Catholicism makes it less susceptible to the influence of nationalism as a quasi-religion than Protestantism, which is more self-critical?

Dr. Tillich: Yes, in the concentration camps the Catholic priests were the most courageous. And they were also the most numerous. As a German Protestant, this was a very painful experience for me. It took quite some time before the Protestant church really resisted Nazism, and when it finally did, it had many martyrs. But a small group in the church remained positively on the side of Hitler. A man who is very near to me, *was* very near to me, described this horror in a book which appeared in the first months of Nazi government, and in which Hitler actually was called (in the words of this important and most learned theologian, Emmanuel Hirsch) the "voice of God to the German people."

Both Protestantism and liberal humanism are fragile, because they are autonomous to a certain extent, because they involve every individual's personal decision. Central power is always stronger if decisions are made hierarchically. Look at the tremendous strength of the Roman church, which operates through the most thorough form of monarchic hierarchy, even to the point of one finally decisive will. It is interesting to me that in modern times this strength has even had the power of self-reformation in the person of Pope-John XXIII, who used his enormous power against the reactionary groups in the Council to carry through his ideas. Power as such, therefore, can also be used for the good and can serve to strengthen such an organization morally. Protestantism, on the other hand, is by nature dispersed and disrupted in all its aspects and directions, theologically and organizationally. The organizationally "different churches" are no longer harmful, since their individual differences do not mean very much. But theological and ethical differences: these make it fragile. And the same thing is true of liberal

democracy, which has many similar disadvantages. These disadvantages will increase as our mass society increasingly demands centralization. And authentic democratic processes will become less possible.

Student: Our last question concerns our reading of *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions,* from which we have been unable to do more than generalize about the "narrowing" of a religion proper that occurs as a result of its encounter with a quasi-religion, such as nationalism. Our purpose in this question is to gain a more concrete understanding of this generalization.

Dr. Tillich: Let us consider the experience of the resistance of the German churches against Hitler. And in this case I speak of the Protestant churches, because the Catholic churches were not so disrupted by Nazism. The Protestant churches were deeply involved because they had harbored a Hitler-minded group, which the Catholics did not. So the non-Hitler group, which was at first a small minority and then slowly became a majority, was compelled to define the position Christianity should take against such ideas as Hitler's being "the voice of God for the German people." And any success it had was due mostly to the influence of Karl Barth, who was providentially able to lead the movement because he himself had narrowed down his theology. He became *the* man, and the savior of European Protestantism. But the price to be paid was a narrowing of theological thinking which we have not yet fully overcome. In Germany today church leaders are all members of that anti-Nazi fighting group, who had, for that very reason, deserved to become the leaders of the future church. And they still remain in that state of mind — still, psychologically, a fighting, defending church. In the meantime, this defense is no longer necessary; but the theological narrowness remains. However, this situation is beginning to change, and one of the symptoms of the change is that the narrow Barthian theology no longer holds the center of interest for German Protestantism. The center of interest is now Bultmann and the whole problem of historical criticism, which in itself is a widening of the religious point of view.

Allow me to add a much greater and more important example, namely, the Catholic church. The Catholic church up to the Reformation was wide open. Only in the later Middle Ages, when it felt threatened, did it slowly narrow down. But even that was not really decisive; it was still capable of many theologies and many movements without a need for serious centralization. But with the coming of the Reformation, the Roman church lost this openness and in many respects narrowed down. That is what Pope John felt so deeply. This, you see, is an even clearer example than the recent German one. The Counter Reformation defended the Roman church against the Protestant attack, but at the same time narrowed down its theology. It is my opinion that the Roman church should be judged first in its glory as exemplified by the early and medieval church, and only secondly in its narrowness as revealed since the Council of Trent, held in the sixteenth century in opposition to the Reformation.

Now the Reformation itself proceeded through the same stages. In Luther, Protestantism was

still quite open. But their battle for existence demanded that they define themselves. And creed, the creedal statements of the different groups, Reformed and Lutheran and so on, restricted the wide and open movements of the Reformation. It was unavoidable, life-and-death battle against Roman power. Our very restricted, narrow Protestant orthodoxy was the result. These are the chief historical examples of the narrowing of a religion proper.

Student: You say that in self-defense it seems to be characteristic for a religion to be forced to define itself. And it appears that throughout history this self-definition is always narrowing. Why must this be so? Why does self-definition result in the narrowing of a religion? And, in a sense, a demonization?

Dr. Tillich: Do you know what the word "definition" means, where it comes from? From *finis* which is "final," "finite." And *definire* in Latin means "to circumscribe," "give a boundary to," make of something a particular finite thing. This means that openness is taken away by the definition. When we read, for instance, of the development of Christian dogma, we find that for the first three hundred years, up to 325, many possible interpretations were formulated. They were finally reduced, in the Council of Nicaea, to one very powerful and very questionable formula. It was too narrow, although this very formula stands today in all our Christian churches as the most holy of all churchly decisions. Its one decisive achievement was the establishment of the Logos, the second Person, as equal in nature with God the Father. That was the decision, and it is fundamental; it prevented Christianity from becoming one of the sects which at the time believed in a half-god.

But it was too narrow in the way in which it was formulated, and a large majority of the church revolted against it. By virtue of additions and other interpretations, openness still remained possible. But again a door was closed, and again the formulations were narrowed down. The whole history of Christian dogma is a continuous narrowing down, but at the same time a *defining.* And the definition is important, because without it many elements would have undercut the whole church, would have denied its existence. The dogma, therefore, the dogmatic development, is not something merely lamentable or evil. It was the necessary form by which the church kept its very identity.

We have all heard about the search for identity, which means that our generation has lost its identity. Keeping identity is very important. And it demands definition and circumscriptions. What ideally *should* be the church has to be defined and therefore circumscribed. The tragic element in all history is that if something like this must be done, it immediately has the consequence of narrowing down and excluding very valuable elements, as in the development of the church. All this finally fell under the criticism of the Protestant spirit — which, however, after fifty years of existence became more orthodox than the Roman church itself. And then it, in turn, had to be enlightened.

Professor: Is there any solution to that paradox?

Dr. Tillich: No. I mean we simply have to do it each time in the best way we can, and then our successors a hundred years from now can judge what we did wrong.

Student: You would say then that the real force, or the real power, that could be loosed symbolically, has been lost by establishing dogmas?

Dr. Tillich: No, the dogmas were necessary. They were also preservative. They both preserved and concealed. You see, this is the dialectic of all dogmas, of all doctrinal statements about living things. They protect. Luther said that all Christian dogmas were protective dogmas. They were not statements like philosophical affirmations, but protected something experienced as a living reality against distortions and misinterpretation and the invasion of foreign elements. But in doing so, they covered up something of the living power. The theological work we have to do is to illuminate the original meaning of what was done in this or that dogma, and also what was lost by it, and then reformulate it.

Symbol and Reality

Student: Dr. Tillich, this question has concerned me ever since the seminar began. Would you say then that the Christian theology of Christ, the theology of his nature, is a process of definition? And if this is so, is he a symbol and not necessarily the force that Christian theology claims?

Dr. Tillich: Now you have asked two different questions — that of definition and that of symbol. Let me first answer the question of symbol. The situation in this case is especially clear. It is so clear that it is the best way of making understandable what a symbol is generally. To speak of Jesus Christ: this *was* understandable for Paul, who introduced this kind of speaking. Later it became less and less understandable; it became a proper name like Paul Tillich, Jesus Christ! In reality "Jesus Christ" means (and the Apostle Paul still knew and felt it) "Jesus who is called the Messiah or the Anointed One" as expected by all nations and especially by the people in Israel who were called "those who are waiting," the quiet ones in the country who were waiting. They waited for the coming of this Messiah or Anointed One who was described in anticipation by the prophets. And the idea, of course, is much older than Israel. The birth of the son, of a king who would save the world, was expected in Egypt and other surrounding areas. So we have this symbol of the Anointed One, the Christ who would come one day and bring a new aeon — "aeon" meaning a new period of history, a new world in which the old, aging, and demonically controlled world would experience a new birth. I am describing the mythological symbolism.

Originally this symbolism connected with the word Christ, the bringer of the new aeon, was paradoxically attributed by some people to a man who lived with them, lived amongst them; namely, a man named Jesus who was said to have come from Nazareth, and so on. This was the

great Christian paradox. Here we can see the difference between history and symbol. The historical event was a man who probably had the name Jesus and probably came from Nazareth — we do not know exactly in terms of historical research, but that fact is as probable as all historical things. This symbol was attributed to him as well as other symbols. Another is "Son of God" or "Son of Man." He himself probably used for himself "Son of Man," which was also a symbol used in the Book of Daniel for a heavenly spirit standing before the face of God and sent down by him in order to destroy the kingdoms of the world and to bring about another kingdom. Now these are symbols, but Jesus of Nazareth is a historical reality. In the name Jesus Christ we unite the historical reality and the symbol. That should answer your first question.

There was another question about definition. We have paradoxical statements that there was a divine nature in Jesus Christ, a fully divine nature and a fully human nature, and that they were not mixed and not separated. These terms finally became the official doctrine of the church. But again, they are understandable only if we use the Greek words. And then we find that it is very difficult to deal intelligibly with these terms today. In order to experience the full power of this event today — Jesus as the Christ — perhaps we need other predicates. Does that answer your question?

If so, I would like to ask you one question about symbols. Do you feel that the present American nation is in danger of becoming, in a bad sense, a quasi-religion? I have often thought about it. Is the symbol of the "American Way," which seems to be *the* main symbol, a vocational distortion of the original vocational idea of bringing something new into the world? To me that was the vocation of the founding fathers — a new beginning. It is still here. The intensity of the "new beginning" is a tremendous thing. At the same time this phrase, the "American Way," seems to contradict the "new beginning." Even without the danger of extremist movements, there is a danger that the American vocational consciousness may slowly become, in combination with American power, a quasi-religious element for many people. I don’t know the answer. I ask you only to consider this for later discussions.

Professor: Dr. Tillich, that is why I asked you about the segregationists. I think what danger we have is regional; they may mark a beginning.

Dr. Tillich: I shall add my own feelings on this subject. During the McCarthy period my refugee friends from Europe — Germany and the other countries — kept saying, "Fascism is coming here. Hitler’s name is now McCarthy." But I always insisted, "You do not know the Americans; you do not know the Middle West. You don’t know all the strong forces in the grass roots that would never accept this." And I was right, of course. Now I do not think that direct Fascism is the real danger. It is more a hidden replacement of the really ultimate by the ultimacy of the so-called "American way of life." This term, to me, has a questionable connotation because it is static; it fixes something. And it contradicts the "new beginning" character of original American life. This is the problem, at any rate, but I think we must stop now.

Professor: Dr. Tillich has provided some tools with which we can attempt to answer this. I think one key is going to be his statement that dogma is necessary to protect. Is this "American Way" a necessary dogma to protect something vital? Or is it not?

NOTES:

1. *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions,* p. 17.

2. *Ibid.,* p. 16.

return to religion-online

Ultimate Concern - Tillich in Dialogue by D. Mackenzie Brown

Donald Mackenzie Brown is Chairman of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of California in Santa Barbara. This book was published in 1965 by Harper & Row, Publishers. This book was prepared for Religion Online by Harry W. and Grace C. Adams.

Fourth Dialogue

Professor: Our topic is socialism as a quasi-religion. Since we have no questions or comments from any of you as yet on the work of the last session, we may proceed with this subject as prepared for today.

Can Socialism Replace Christianity?

Student: The first question for our consideration is: "Do Communism and socialism meet the needs of modern man to such an extent that Christianity in its organized form has become obsolete?" This question is directed to everyone. And any impressions that you now have would be appreciated.

Student: Well, it seems to me, from the discussions we've had before with Dr. Tillich, that this "ultimate concern" is so universal that no one can avoid it now or will ever be able to avoid it. When it is misdirected toward some sort of finite vocation or finite end and like Communism or socialism, the lack of true ultimacy must sooner or later become apparent because finite ends eventually reveal their own limitations. In this way, I do not think Christianity or other religions proper can be considered obsolete. We can say that Communism and socialism or even capitalism will serve for a while as quasi-religions, but in the end they cannot satisfy the highest aspirations of humanity.

Student: I think that the element lacking is the spiritual element. Communism and socialism are not rooted in the spiritual at all. They deny it, as a matter of fact. As Dr. Tillich says, the basic thing in man — in everyone — is the spiritual, which is lacking in socialism and Communism.

Student: You are looking at it from your own point of view. If you had ever talked to a socialist who was really involved in the thing, you would realize that a hard-core socialist actually believes he has the answers for himself and others. You're looking at it from the outside.

Student: Well, socialism does have the same eschatological — such a funny word, I like the sound of it — hope that Christianity does: the belief that eventually, in the future, at some point in time, God — or a new way, a new state of things — will break into history. Christianity and Communism both talk about a point in time when history will be changed.

Student: We are overlooking the greatest appeal of the Communist and socialist ideologies, the promise in these theories of a heaven on earth. They promise an earthly paradise. I think this is the main reason Christianity declined in the nineteenth century. People were oppressed, and there was nothing in the future except death. After death, perhaps, they would find paradise and perhaps not. Socialism promises something tangible here on earth that would be better than that.

Student: I read a book called *The Naked God* by Howard Fast, who has written a number of books – *Citizen Tom Paine* and others that are reasonably well known in America. He was an intellectual who went into the movement about 1943 and was completely captivated by it. He was gripped by the humanistic aspects and thought he was doing good for other people. He feels that most people in America that go into the Communist party are good, wholesome, well-meaning people who think it is a good movement that will help others. He soon learned that the leaders had no respect whatsoever for individuals except in so far as they brought in money, went out and worked, and completely put themselves at the disposal of the movement. The point I finally got out of the book was the fact that no utopia has ever worked completely. And eventually people — even the peasants in Russia who think they are going to see Heaven on earth — will see that it is not coming. No one has ever worked out a way whereby people really can rule themselves as a perfect utopia. I believe they will lose faith in socialism and Communism just as they did in Christianity. Perhaps then they will be reawakened to the fact that they need something that Christianity or the other organized religions can supply, which socialism cannot supply. It never has and apparently never will. History has proved that it doesn’t work.

Student: I think that a reawakening in Christianity is apparent, at least in its organized forms as we see it today. But I think there is a very great need to rediscover our symbols and what they mean. And the Christianity of today does not seem to be fulfilling this need. As Dr. Tillich says, these symbols may not be dead or useless, but they do need to be revitalized.

Student: You made the remark a while ago that, because Communism or socialism are concerned with the finite, they cannot meet man’s need for confrontation with ultimate concern. Now I am confused about this "being concerned ultimately," which some socialists and Communists certainly are. They may not have "ultimate concern" as we see it, but their finite concern is ultimate at the moment, at a given moment in time.

Does religion mean that we are "ultimately concerned," or does it mean that we are concerned with something "ultimate"? This is not clear to me. For if it means that we are ultimately

concerned, then Communism and socialism are just as religious as anything else. Could you throw some light on that, sir?

Dr. Tillich: I am very grateful for your question. I think that you have come to the point of the problem. There are innumerable ultimate concerns which are concerned with the ultimate. And the whole question is: What is the ultimate? When we criticize particular forms of Christianity — Roman Catholic absolutism for example, or Protestant dogmatic fanaticism — we deny that the ultimate is really involved in these forms. Here, exactly the same thing occurs as in socialism and nationalism, or what have you, namely, that particular expressions of ultimate concern become confused with that toward which they point: the ultimate. And in this sense religion and quasi-religion share the same distortion. Perhaps I will not say more at this moment, because this is your discussion.

Student: We talk about religions being obsolete. Let me pose this question. Here is Christianity, which as a religion has obviously been misunderstood for approximately nineteen hundred years. Does this not reflect on the wisdom and authority of its founder? Wouldn't you think that a man who is the Son of God — or whatever you believe, part of God, part of the Trinity — wouldn't you think that, when he came to earth, he would organize this religion in a way that would make it clearer to those who were to follow it?

Student: If Christ had done something like this, when he came, it seems to me he would have been denying the humanity in man. This is the very essence of the meaning of Christ — that we are human but are seeking this new being which we can find in Christ. And being human, we are inevitably led into error and distortion, but have the possibility through Christ of overcoming it. If this element of error had not remained, the meaning of the symbol of Christ would be gone.

Student: But Jesus, as the symbol of the cross, retained the principle of self-denial and self-criticism, so lacking in Communism and so necessary in true religion.

Self-Criticism in Christianity and Communism

Professor: Should we really agree on the statement that the quasi-religions do not have self-criticism and self-sacrifice? We have many examples of the self-sacrifice of Communists and other extremists, for what is to them an ultimate concern. And we have examples of self-criticism within the party. Their confessions, for instance, may seem a travesty of justice in our eyes, but they do represent a form of self-criticism and sacrifice.

Student: But does that really have any effect on Communism? It doesn't seem to have any effect, whereas the self-criticism within Christianity over the centuries has had some profound effects.

Student: Would not the dialectical materialism that is at the heart of Communism cause Communism continually to re-evaluate itself, to judge whether the means it was using to bring about its ends, or even the ends themselves, might be questionable?

Student: Well, in my reading I found exactly the opposite. The point is that Communism is supposedly never wrong. And it is this lack of self-critical idealism that makes it so difficult. Lenin stated that the Marxian doctrine is omnipotent because it is true. That is all he said about it. It is not re-evaluated, although Stalin and Lenin manipulated the doctrine to such an extent that it changed considerably. But the basic idea is that it is true and should not be disturbed. The element of self-criticism, at least according to my reading, just does not exist.

Student: If there is criticism, it seems to be concerned more with deviations from the Marxist line than with really getting at the truth. They do say to themselves, "Criticize," but then the response is, "Well, we've deviated from the Marxist line. Let's look at what Marx said." And they do what they can to get back on that line. But they do not question the correctness of the road or line.

Professor: I think you are absolutely right. The dialectic process seems to stop, once the basic ideology has emerged as a new truth. Is this not also true in Christianity? The Christian also judges himself in terms of the Christian ultimate, does he not? He does not go back and question the basic premises of the Gospels.

Student: I don't quite understand your comparison of Christianity with Communism. Do you mean that Christians don't question the basic premises of their religion?

Professor: They may question their own understanding of it, or a particular expression of it; but the basic idea they could hardly question and still remain Christian.

Student: And so they may stop questioning at a certain point?

Professor: Yes, as with your Communists.

Student: Dr. Tillich, can you give us an idea of what your feeling is about this self-critical element and Communism?

Dr. Tillich: When I discussed Communism as a quasi-religion, I included several stages of socialism that finally led to Communism. The early, battling stages had all the elements of the Old Testament religion, the prophetic form. But the founders of Communism set up no principle of self-criticism inherent in the structure itself, no principle by which the collective or the party or the representatives of the party could criticize itself or themselves. We recognized this fact during the years when I was able to follow the development of socialism — first into

Communism and then from Communism into the state of things we have now, which is a kind of radical totalitarian state capitalism. These different stages must be distinguished. In the earlier stages the religious character was clearly present.

As for the problem of self-sacrifice or self-criticism, the individual's self-sacrifice manifests itself in every religion and quasi-religion. It existed even in Nazism. And we cannot deny it to Fascism; this is simply an historical fact. But in Christianity, in the symbol of the cross, there is the fundamental revelation that he who was supposed to bring the new aeon, the new reality, the new being, the eschatological fulfillment, the Kingdom of God — all this — in order to achieve it had to sacrifice himself, in his individual character, as a bearer of the ultimate. I have expressed this idea in paradoxical terms which have often been misunderstood but to which I nonetheless adhere: Jesus sacrificed himself as Jesus to himself as the Christ. It is by this intricate form that I believe we have to interpret the symbol of the cross. Now the consequence of this concept is that Christianity, in principle, can never accept one of its actualized forms as the final form. And whenever it does so, it deviates from the fundamental understanding of the cross.

I have often been questioned about this and have referred to the conflict between Jesus and his disciples, where the fundamental form of the problem is revealed. The disciples wanted to make him the Messiah. I think this is what distinguished him from the other Messiahs who appeared in the same period, but who could not succeed because they were political revolutionaries in a situation where the political revolution of a comparatively small town in the Roman Empire was a heroic and ridiculous thing, and involved the ruin of the nation concerned. Therefore, Jesus' role as the Messiah closely follows the prophecy of Isaiah. [53:5][1] He was able to connect his mission with that of Isaiah's bringer of the new reality. This I believe was the tremendous deed, the real act of the divine spirit in him and through him. As for the mythology concerning the third person of the Trinity coming down from heaven — forget all about it! Look instead at the real image we have in the New Testament, especially in the synoptic Gospels, and then as interpreted in the Fourth Gospel, where this whole situation is so clearly revealed that it can be applied to all our problems.

Now about socialism and Communism, my feeling is that an adequate criterion for judgment is inherent in neither. This lack has one consequence, for example, which I can report to you simply from my own continuous experience in Germany. They did not produce spiritually prominent or outstanding personalities. In its heroic, ecstatic beginnings, the German social democracy produced personalities who felt a real ultimate concern. Later, the leaders became advanced functionaries. They ceased to be people like the early workers, full of spirit, like Marx himself and others even before him in the period of utopian socialism.

An economic movement in itself, or a political party in itself, is not an ultimate, although it can be the bearer of an ultimate. But if it is considered to be an ultimate in itself, then the life and development of personalities is sacrificed, which was the tragedy of the German Social

Democratic Party. They had no leaders of real spiritual power; I knew almost all of them at the time Hitler came. This structure has not essentially changed in Communism. The party in itself is beyond criticism, although the party is an empirical reality and led by people like Stalin. The result is a phenomenon which makes itself absolute and reveals some trait in common with Nazism: political aggressiveness against everything non-Communist, and at the same time an internal lack of spiritual experience and leadership.

Student: In my reading this week, I found that in *Communism and Christianity* you refer to the ultimate form of socialism as utopian socialism, and I would like to ask what the difference is between utopian socialism and the final goal of Communist thought, the paradise of Communism?

Dr. Tillich: In their eschatology, or concept of final days, there is no essential difference. The real difference lies between the democratic procedures which in the first decade of this century were instituted by the Social Democrats and the interpretation of Marxism by Communists as the dictatorship of the proletariat. This means in practice the dictatorship of a small hierarchy coming out of the proletariat. And this fundamental difference at the beginning of the twentieth century produced the split between socialism and Communism, both of which previously had shared Marx as their leading spirit.

"Utopian socialist" has nothing to do with the word utopia; it means simply "idealistic socialist," a socialist who believes that by persuading the ruling classes to surrender their ruling power one might be able to effect a transformation of society. Marx, on the other hand, recognized the class situation; he believed that a class situation is a power situation and that therefore there must be a transformation of society with power. On this basis the difference developed.

With respect to the theories in my own period, in the twenties, there was still a "scientific Marxism" in the Social Democratic Party. "Scientific" means calculating, and this was one of the reasons for its defeat. We sat in our chairs and calculated the coming of socialism through the necessities of the dialectical process. In France, on the other hand, because of the strong influence of Sorel, the "voluntaristic" line of thought was decisive. And both the Fascists in Italy and the Communists depended on voluntarism, which meant that you cannot just "calculate" the coming of socialism but must bring it about. And you must bring it about by radical revolutionary activity. The German social democracy did not agree, but insisted that we must accomplish it through democratic procedures. We must win the majority. And they did win the majority democratically, even under Wilhelm II shortly before World War I; but not with sufficient fullness or depth.

So here we have two types of approach, calculating and voluntaristic, and they must be distinguished. Both shared a common scripture, namely, the *Communist Manifesto* as a creed and the other writings of Marx — especially *Das Kapital* — as the Bible. But you know we

must never cease to try to interpret any Bible. This is good, because continuing interpretation implies an authority, a point of reference which in itself has judging power, while on the other hand there is freedom to interpret. And this element of freedom we also have in socialism and Communism.

In this sense all churches that have a definite symbol are authoritarian. It is always through interpretation that the divine Spirit manifests itself, transforming the original point of reference again and again in many ways. So I would say that this is not the point of difference. The difference between socialist organization and the church lies in the object, which for socialism is a collective with its leader, and for the church a community in which the transcendent is not to be grasped in any particular form. But in the moment when the church identifies itself with a fixed form of interpretation it becomes no better than the Communist collective, which is only another form of community with absolute claim.

Professor: There seems to be some disagreement between what I suggested and what you have just said in regard to self-criticism. It was first said here that there was no self-criticism in the Communist party, but that it existed within the church. I suggested then that there was self-criticism in both, and you have pointed out that it is not the same in the two. To clarify this, could we say that there is a self-criticism within Communism and socialism only in so far as the individual is concerned. I know this to be the case with Chinese Communists. Like Boy Scouts, at the end of the day they would ask themselves how well they had done; how many old ladies they had taken across the street; how they had helped their fellow man. In all these matters, that sound so Christian, the Communist students criticized themselves and each other. Yet the point you make, if I understand you, is that this criticism, although present as in Christianity, is not the same sort of criticism because it does not extend to party structure. That is its fatal weakness. Whereas in Christianity, if we exclude the authoritarian Catholic tradition, we do have a criticism of structure and symbol as well.

Dr. Tillich: Yes, that’s right.

Student: You are saying that within the Communist party, there is no criticism of the basic structure of the party itself. Would you also say that there is no criticism of the results of the manipulations of this party — the handling of agriculture and national affairs?

Dr. Tillich: On the contrary, there is continuous criticism. Leaders are being dismissed every day, if you read your *New York Times.*

The American Way of Life

Student: We shall proceed now to another question which relates to the very end of the meeting a week ago in which Dr. Tillich asked, "Does the American way of life represent a profanization of the vocational element of American nationalism today?"

Professor: Are you going to explain vocation again?

Student: I wish you had not asked that! But the vocational element here I think is what the individual is striving for in American nationalism or what we are seeking as Americans — our goals.

Student: I would also like to get a definition for the word "profanization."

Student: This occurs when your ultimate goal is obscured or compromised by material things or finite things. Is it true, Dr. Tillich, that profanization occurs in quasi-religions, but is termed "demonization" in religions proper?

Dr. Tillich: That is generally true, yes. I do not know if we ought even to use the European word "profanization" here. If we define it, we may use it. Otherwise we must say "secularization," for the word "profane" now means vulgar or having to do with swearing and I don't know what else, although originally it meant simply "not in the sanctuary." Words often cannot be saved. And I do not know whether this word can be restored to its original meaning; I'm doubtful. Once a word acquires a connotation of evil, the stigma cannot be removed. I am trying in my third volume of *Systematic Theology* to save this word, but I shall probably fail. In any case, when you use it, explain that you mean secularization.

Now the word "vocation" I am not using in relation to the individual. I mean rather that every nation has a particular vocation which gives meaning to its power. This is a central point in my whole interpretation of history. Wherever I have discussed it, I have given examples from Western history of the vocational feeling which great nations have. And this American nation has had, and still has, the ideas of the new beginning, free from the curses of the European past.

Student: I want to ask Dr. Tillich how the word "cause" does as a synonym for the word "vocation"?

Dr. Tillich: Yes, it is a "cause for which one fights," for which a nation stands. Now my English is not sufficient to feel the nuances clearly here. Would you say that the feeling of the Jewish people to be the religiously selected people was a cause, or that the feeling of the Roman Empire that it must bring law to all nations within reach of Rome was a cause? Or that the Greeks' feeling that they represented the highest culture of humanity, as opposed to the barbarians was a cause? I leave to those born into the English language to say whether the word "cause" is better or worse than "vocation." In "vocation" there is that element of being called; it is an historic destiny. In "cause" there is something a little bit arbitrary. We can fight for one cause today, and tomorrow for quite a different one. But in vocation there is an historical coalescence between the nation and the vocation and that for which it stands. So I personally

prefer the word vocation.

Student: If we can think of "vocation" as a continuous goal, and of "profanization" as making something common or secularized, I think we can employ these terms of Dr. Tillich.

Student: But are we thinking of the American vocation as giving democracy to the world or are we thinking of it as something else?

Student: I think that, when we were discussing this last week, we were referring to democracy and freedom. American nationalism involves spreading what we feel is unique to our own country among other countries throughout the world. For the purpose of discussion let us say that American nationalism refers to democracy and our basis of government.

Professor: But are you rejecting Dr. Tillich's own definition of it as the new beginning, free from the restrictions of European tradition?

Dr. Tillich: The *curses* of European tradition. I use that word because we have felt that curse, particularly the division of Europe in the year 843 between east and west,[2] and ever since that time through continuous disrupting wars. Up to World War II, European nations depended on this curse, which of course had in itself also many positive elements — among them the richness of the development of individual nations. Both sides must be considered. But the curses obviously proved stronger, and the American founding fathers, when they emigrated, wanted to be free of them, and also of the resulting authoritarianism. And it was a new beginning. But you are right of course in inquiring as to the content of this new beginning. And we might answer: a liberal democracy.

Student: I understand your statement, but I wonder if we any longer feel or understand the curse of European society. I know people who have traveled in Europe and have mentioned the differences in European society, but I don't think they feel this any more.

Dr. Tillich: Oh! Now this — the curse — you either feel or do not feel. Take what is happening now in relation to De Gaulle. It was quite a shock for the whole Western world that these events could again occur, for what he is doing with his intense French nationalism expresses the year 843 rather than 1963. As a traveler in Europe you yourself certainly may not feel anything of this. But if you had been born as I was, shortly after the Franco-Prussian War toward the end of the nineteenth century, and remembered it fully, with the wars of liberation and the Napoleonic wars as earlier examples before you, you would feel it. And then, with experience especially of World War I, in which I myself participated, and again of World War II, you would feel a definite curse.

Student: I think what the previous speaker and I feel is that today America is king. We are the

big daddy, and Europe is now trying to come up to us through industrialization. And we don't look at her any more as if we needed to get away from her as the founding fathers did. Now we are sending aid to all the other countries in the world. We don't appear to be trying to get away from Europe's curse. We have achieved our ideal, and we are trying to give it to other people now — this thing of democracy and freedom.

Dr. Tillich: Oh yes, but that is a crusading spirit coming out of the early years. You see, I went back to the foundation of America and tried to find the reason for the vocational feeling which, for example, drove Wilson in World War I to "make the world safe for democracy." And this crusading spirit is still here. If you come from outside, you feel it. And now of course it is the "salvation" of democracy that expresses this American feeling.

Student: I think perhaps we have got away from the original question. We are all aware of the American way of life as one based on democracy and the principles of freedom, but is this being debased today in such a way that the impression we make is not one that we might have presented fifty years ago?

Student: It seems to me that if the American vocation is truly that of a new beginning, as soon as you systematize it into any set pattern or "American way of life" as certain groups do today, it would definitely be a profanization. But I think this will remain rather an insignificant threat to America as a whole, unless we are put into a position of such insecurity that fear would drive us into defending ourselves by narrowing down our way of life. I think that as long as Americans in general are secure they will realize that this freedom and new beginning must not be debased by putting them into a rigid formula called the American Way of Life.

Student: I think the central issue is the idea of external authority versus internal authority, which is the issue of freedom as the founding fathers of our country saw it. This new beginning, or new cause, is a very important concept to keep in mind. We have this freedom to work with, and what we do with it will be something completely new in history. I mean, we *could* do quite a bit with it. Erich Fromm reminds us of the tendencies to "escape from freedom," to go back to an external form of authority, which is what happened through militant, profane nationalism. I think we must keep that in mind so as not to go off on extraneous issues.

Dr. Tillich: Now whether we call it nationalism or patriotism, my question last Sunday was, "Is there a really strong trend to cross over into the deterioration of nationalism which I call Fascism? How far are we in danger of the transition from the justified quasi-religion of nationalism or national self-consciousness — that vocational feeling of the nation which is all to the good — into Fascism, which makes the nation an idol, elevating it to a position that dominates everything in the world? As a German hymn patriotically cries, "Deutschland, Deutschland uber Alles!" (Germany, Germany above everything!) If an American sang this seriously and not just as propaganda, he would be on the way to shifting his spirit from nationalism to Fascism.

Is there a danger of this happening? That was our question. It is very hard to make a general statement. I feel more optimistic than many of my refugee colleagues and friends, whose eyes are always sharp for things like the coming of Fascism and Nazism. They think they see the whole picture very clearly. I have traveled too much in this country, and especially know too many students and colleagues from all sections of America, to believe that the danger is very near.

Can Religion Be Restored When Replaced by Socialism?

Student: Now for our next question: How does one restore the meaning of religious goals after their destruction by quasi-religions such as socialism? Is there any possibility of restoring our goals through dogmas? The Catholics have had a long history and have pretty well kept themselves intact by just this means. Is Protestantism so diluted that dogma can no longer implement this restoration of meaning?

Student: What developed at the last seminar was this idea of the attack of the quasi-religions, such as socialism, on our religions proper, the result being the narrowing or self-defining of the religion by dogma. So it would be logical to expect that the restoration of religious goals would involve a re-expansion of the narrowed religions proper by the revision of dogma. Perhaps Dr. Tillich could help us out here.

Dr. Tillich: Yes. Now shall I answer this question? First of all, I do not like the term "religious goals." It sounds as if religion first put special goals before us, and we then should march toward them. But religion acts in precisely the opposite way. Religion always first gives, and *then* demands. So the concept of goal or purpose is inadequate. In the whole of religious literature we will not find it. Eschatology — or the Kingdom of God — these are not goals. They are something given, and the only goal could be the concrete actualization of them in this or that moment. But they are "given" by the presence of the divine Spirit in reality. That is the one thing I can say to this. As for destruction by quasi-religions, there is no destruction. Nothing is destroyed. The word is not adequate; the situation is much deeper.

The process of secularization is the basis for all three quasi-religions and many others you might mention. And secularization means the cutting off of the finite from its relationship to the infinite, and a concentration on the finite. I have called this process (in a frequently quoted phrase) "the in-itself-resting finitude" — the finitude which is not shaken, which rests in itself and does not move up to the infinite, or unconditional, or ultimate. This is secularization. Now if, in this secularization, moments arise which try to give meaning to life by evaluating some of the elements in this secular world as matters of highest and sometimes ultimate concern, we come face to face with the various quasi-religions. I believe that in my writing on the world religions I have clearly described this secularization as the general foundation for the quasi-religions.

In Japan we have a secularization inherited from the West together with industrialization. But which of the quasi-religions will win in Japan on the basis of its secularization is a question for the future. Will what we hope for — liberal humanism, as I term our own situation — be the victor? Or will nationalism, certainly triumphant in the Tojo government during the war, return. Or will Communism, improbable up until now, finally prevail? Each of these three can, on the basis of secularism, become the determining quasi-religion in any country where secularism is powerful. There is some hope that American democracy (or my term "liberal humanism") may be successful.

We can say, in any case, that secularism has definitely undercut religious symbols.

Dr. Tillich: But let us approach this subject with care. The word dogma has almost completely disappeared, as some of you have already indicated. Dogma is a development related to Greek philosophy. The word itself comes from the philosophical schools of the late ancient world. It is not originally a religious word, but means a "particular doctrine." If you had joined the Stoics, the Epicureans, or others, you would have accepted this or that fundamental dogma, which you could then have freely developed. Following this model, Christianity had its own dogma — namely, that Jesus is the Christ. The dogma is implicit in the very name Jesus Christ. This name *is* the fundamental dogma. All other Christian dogmas have a supporting and protective role; they are not in themselves important.

But the real situation with which we are faced is the loss of the power of religious symbols in general. We can no longer speak of God easily to anybody because he will immediately question, "Does he exist?" Now the very asking of the question signifies that the symbols of God have become meaningless. For God, in the question, has become one of innumerable objects in time and space which may or may not exist. And this is not the meaning of God at all.

In the same way, we can no longer use the word "sin" because we have distorted it to mean a particular act which contradicts particular conventional moralities, especially when it refers to sex. For Paul, sin is a demonic power overarching all reality; and he usually uses the word not in the plural but in the singular, as the "sin" which is the demonic power over the world. Here, then, are two examples of the distortion of religious concepts within the church, and then their consequent rejection by the secular world.

How this situation can be overcome without a fundamental reformation of the way in which Christianity expresses its symbols, preaches them, and interprets them, I really do not know, although my whole theological work has been directed precisely to the interpretation of religious symbols in such a way that the secular man — and we are all secular — can understand and be moved by them. On this basis (which is a small confession to you about my work), I believe it *may* be possible to reinterpret the great symbols of the past in a way that restores meaning to some of them. For example, I would forbid, under penalty of dismissal, any

minister from using the words "original sin" for the next thirty years, until this term regained some meaning. But since it is doubtful that it will ever regain any meaning, it should probably be dismissed altogether. Even Professor Niebuhr,[3] who defended and used it in his earlier work, has told me that he now believes it is impossible. "Let's drop it," he said. This is one way of doing it.

Another way, however, is to reinterpret what the symbols applied to Jesus mean. I felt this strongly in your very first remarks today about a divine being sitting in Heaven, and deciding one day to come down to us, and then being able to do everything that God does. You must see what a distortion this is of the way in which these ideas originally developed. Actually, there was this man Jesus; and there were people who were with him whom he impressed more and more as somebody whom they had expected to come — "the Anointed One"; and he seemed to be anointed with the divine Spirit. You can sense people who are full of divine Spirit, who radiate spiritual power. Then they gave him a lot of names — all symbols; some called him the Son of Man, or it might even have been that he called himself that. And the "Son of Man" at that time, in the society in which he lived, probably meant that heavenly being described in the Book of Daniel in the seventh chapter, who stands before God and is sent down by him to overcome empires. They gave him that name, and it was a symbol. "Christ" is a symbol much older even than "Israel." It comes from Egypt: "the Anointed One." And "Son of God" is a symbol. It was

used for Israel, and later for the remnant of Israel, and then for the man in the most intimate relationship to God. In the Greek world it was used for real sons and daughters of gods who had sexual relations with human beings. This meaning, of course, had to be removed; but it came back, and the church had great difficulties in finally getting rid of it.

Other symbols are curious. "The Lord," for example, was the name for God in the Greek Old Testament. These various symbols were also given to Jesus. Finally, however, the symbol "Christ" was decisive for his name; and for Christian theology, Logos, the divine word. These are all symbols applied to reality.

Now I shall tell you something I usually say to my theological students. If somebody asks you, "Was Jesus the Son of God?" he is trapping you, intentionally or unintentionally. For if you answer, "Yes," you are guilty of crude mythology. But if you answer, "No," you are saying that Jesus does not deserve this symbol. You have only one way out, which I discovered comparatively early in my career, namely, to ask the questioner, "What do you mean by the term 'Son of God'?" And the moment you ask that question *he* is trapped. Of course he *can* answer; but if he were capable of it he would not have asked the first question so stupidly.

Now this is how we must work our way. Shall we live, in the future, with new symbols? Will they come into existence? Nobody can invent them — I hope I made this clear in the earlier discussions. They may come, and they may grasp us and exert power over us. And then the old

ones may disappear, as has always happened in church history. In Protestantism, since the Reformation, Mary and all the saints have completely disappeared. They cannot be restored. Other symbols may have the same fate. It will be interesting to observe whether the conservative Catholic wing in the Episcopal church, which shows a great interest in "Mariology," will be able, despite being Protestant and a child of the great Reformation, to rediscover the symbol "Holy Virgin" or "Mary" as a religious object. They believe they can, and I know like-minded people even in German Lutheranism. I myself wonder if this rediscovery would not be too artificial to be really convincing. Such efforts may also be applied to other Christian symbols.

Student: Dr. Tillich, our church is trying to build a new building, and our building committee meetings fall into terrible arguments over symbols, symbols that I had assumed were really quite relevant, like the cross. The question that is asked over and over again is: "Why do we have to have all these symbols around us?" Each person on the committee has a different idea of what is suitable, but they do have to come to some decision because the building is going to be put up, regardless.

Dr. Tillich: Which denomination is this?

Student: The Methodist church.

Dr. Tillich: Methodist. Now they are comparatively lacking in symbols, are they not? But on the other hand, they originally sprang from the Episcopal tradition. So I visualize them as a somehow deviating Protestant group with a drop of Catholic tradition still in their blood. Is that not the reason for these difficulties, these disputes?

I once participated in a discussion of this problem, and I found that there are hundreds of traditional symbols of relatively secondary importance which I call "sign symbols." They are not genuine religious symbols, but crowd the boundary between sign and symbol. As to their use today, I personally would be inclined to feel critical or negative toward them, because sign symbols, if dead, can hardly be renewed. You have to have somebody to interpret them. I regret that my mind is now a little empty of symbols of this kind; but they can be found — for example, in the big New York building of the Interchurch Center located on Riverside Drive. People as a whole no longer understand them. They must have guides to interpret them. True, living symbols should be immediately understandable. That would be one criterion.

The other criterion would be whether there is resistance to all of them, as in some churches, because of anxiety concerning the idolatrous use of symbols. This is the reason for the iconoclastic movements in the church, which try to eliminate all pictures and sign symbols. These battles have been waged for hundreds of years, tremendous conflicts in which thousands of people have lost their lives, as in the struggle between the emperors of Byzantium and the bishops. The Reformation again saw a wave of iconoclasm. Beautiful things were ruined in the

old Catholic churches for which we would now pay hundreds of thousands if we could only have them back. All these movements spring from the original, deep Jewish anxiety concerning idolatry. And if we meet a strong iconoclastic bias, we probably should not be too aggressive about forcing sign symbols on people who can not bear them.

Another criterion might be the form in which the symbols are expressed; whether, for example, they appear in a con temporary stylistic expression, so that they are not simply repetitions. Now I know crucifixes. I possess one which says much to me without any naturalistic reference — oh, a hint perhaps, but not more. For if symbols are given meaningful expression, we might just awaken them to life again. As for myself, I would simply throw out a sentimental crucifix of the nineteenth-century or late Renaissance type.

These three criteria or principles we should fight for.

Are the Churches Too Narrow?

Professor: I think perhaps, in the final twenty minutes tonight we might ask anyone who has something that is really bothering him to come forth and speak up.

Student: Something *has* been bothering me. I presume that others may feel the same way. I have been raised in the church since I was a very small child, and have been surrounded by a great deal of sentimentality and everything else. I can't help but be somewhat offended — that is too strong a word really; I am not offended, but disturbed, shall I say — I can't help but be disturbed by some of your comments,

Dr. Tillich, that religions proper, especially among denominations of the Protestant faith, become narrow through their necessity for self-definition. They tend to lose — I think that is what you are saying — much of their validity, of their ritual, of their Christian principles.

Dr. Tillich: Oh, you see, these were general historical remarks. They do not apply to the last discussion, which concerned secularism. Of course there exist fundamentalist movements which simply put up a wall against every thought that would disturb the fundamentalist tradition, and I cannot take them seriously theologically. But what one must take seriously in terms of the whole development of church history is what happened to the Roman church in the Reformation, when it was put on the defense. When you really study church history — the glory of the Roman church and the glory of the old Greek churches in their continual openness toward innumerable elements, allowing the development of different schools such as the Realists and Nominalists, Thornists and Augustinians, and so on — and see the sudden restriction of such freedom by the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century, why then you know what I mean with respect to the Roman church. It has become in all its dogmatic development extremely narrow, and Pope John's recognition of this was a really great experience for me after seventy-six years. He realized that this narrowness cannot be maintained, or the Catholic church would become

completely irrelevant. That is the basis for the present Council. And you have heard and seen how strong the resistance is against his reform. But in many regions — some American, almost all French, German, and British — there is a tremendous desire for it. The Spanish and South American bishops are, of course, the most tradition-bound, hierarchical, and immovable. That is a fact.

Protestantism, also, was once very open. There were many different movements — the Lutheran, the Reformed, and then new divisions between Luther and Calvin, and the Anglican Reformation. The Baptist and other radical evangelical movements followed. But then, in their struggle against the Roman church, they were all forced down to particular confessional expressions. This occurred on the Continent by command of the emperor, according to the law of the Holy Roman Empire, which in a certain sense embraced all Europe. Every religion had to express itself definitively. And the theological struggles commenced. Protestantism would really have been in danger of eradication if it had not permitted itself to make a compromise, at least in this sense: by expressing itself in dogmatic statements in order to be acknowledged by the law of the Holy Roman Empire. These facts lie behind the dogmas.

In America, I would say that denominations do not seem to try to defend themselves at all against other denominations. It is an interdenominational situation — the Protestant spirit everywhere. When you come from outside, you notice this. Evangelical or Reformed, Congregational or Methodist, there are very few particular confessional elements which are still of real importance today.

Now narrowness always develops when we become defensive, when we become fundamentalist and do not listen to any historical inquiry, when we have a non-Copernican world view and do not dare to say anything else. But Protestantism is not very defensive now. Today, with respect to the Roman church, co-operation is increasing. With respect to the secular world, the defense against secularism —this is now the great issue — must not be a narrowing down. The church must take the secular into itself and transform it, as the old church did when it took all the great values of both the classical Greek and the Hellenistic realm into itself, besides the basic Jewish strain. This also occurred in the Middle Ages with the Germanic-Romanic tribes; the church took them in. And I do not see any other way of reinvigorating Christianity.

Are Christian Symbols Necessary?

Student: Dr. Tillich, one difficulty I have is in seeing how we are going to combat secularism with a symbol-less and apparently content-less religion as compared with the old creeds, which admittedly may have gone too far in the other direction and become narrow. How are we going to combat a vibrant faith with plenty of content in it, like Communism, with a highly abstract, highly intellectualized sort of Christian theology in which the old symbols have been destroyed?

It seems to me that you do make a distinction between signs and symbols, and that you admit that symbols, especially the central symbols of faith, do not simply point to the divine reality but in some degree participate in that reality. This is especially true of the symbols pertaining to Christ. And certainly the traditional religion of Christianity has not been a religion of the symbol. It has been the religion of a person, very much so, and in this respect is quite different from the mythical religions of the East. This to me is tremendously important: if you abandon or theorize yourself out of this position, you are still left confronting highly personalistic Western humanistic forms of secularism such as Communism. This may be a source of weakness in your theology rather than strength.

Dr. Tillich: Yes, now as to personalism, if you call Communism "personalistic," this is a problem. But Communism is collectivistic. We cannot call it personalistic. Of course there is the Judeo-Christian background there, which makes it at least *officially* take heed of the individual person. But in many respects it also represses the person. So I would not agree with you on this point.

As to Christianity, it has not lived in the person of Jesus. This assumption constitutes a very small line of church history, adopted by the Pietists and then the liberal theology of the nineteenth century. Both are "Jesus" theologies. The classical Christian theology was never "Jesus" theology, but rather "Christ" theology. And Christ is the symbol, based of course on the image of the man Jesus in the New Testament. That is true. And that is the most resistant element in the symbol, which no secularism has completely destroyed (because even the greatest secularist recognizes the spiritual power in this image). Classical, traditional Christianity has lived in symbols — Creation, Fall, reconciliation, salvation, Kingdom of God, Trinity. These all are great symbols, and I do not wish to lose them.

What you now ask is: Can these symbols, which participate in the power of what they represent — can they be rediscovered in their fundamental meaning? We cannot replace them, but they may die. Then they are gone. It is still possible that the reality of the event which we call "Jesus the Christ" might develop new aspects for itself, but I doubt it. So we are faced with a desperate task, in some respects: to try to reinterpret Christian symbols so that they may become powerful again. There are many people who believe this is impossible, and thus the whole task means a risk — the risk of faith that there are still unexhausted powers in the Christian reality, to be re-examined more fully by more intimate relations with the non-Christian religions, which in turn will also change the symbolic material. The question is now open. We stand at a moment in history in which the openness of the situation is due to its urgency. Christianity is at present not narrow, but has become open to interpretation except in particular groups. And I believe openness is so much an element of Christianity itself, of its original meaning, that this may be the way in which it can be reinterpreted to make it fully alive. But I would not dare to prophesy the outcome.

Student: I see a great danger for the mass of society in dismissing or losing religious symbols,

even if they have become demonized in their relation to believers. If we remove these symbols from their lives, they will more than likely attempt to find other symbols to fill the void. They will join the quasi-religions and move completely in the opposite direction. I think this is clear. I know of several cases, here on campus, of students whose fundamental background in religion has been thoroughly shattered. And in rejecting their own form of Christianity they have rejected all forms of religion, and have accepted "Ban the Bomb" or some ultra-humanistic or ultranationalistic form of quasi-religion. And I think there is great danger in this.

Dr. Tillich: Yes, you are absolutely right. Therefore no symbol should be removed. It should be reinterpreted. And in the pulpit, the minister's criticism should never be so tactless that people in the situation you describe are offended. For instance, on the campus here, or any campus in America, we will find people who criticize not only the special distortions of the religious symbol but the real meaning of the symbol itself. What I therefore think is very important is that in church schools, church sermons, and their homes young people should be given answers to the questions they have to face later anyhow. Children should receive answers as soon as they themselves ask questions. Children are great metaphysicians. They usually ask, at a very early age, the fundamental questions, much more fundamental than most philosophers ask today. And to answer them, it is extremely important that the church remove all superstitious and fantastic connotations from its symbols, in order to make them understandable as meaningful expressions of experience.

Now take the term "estrangement." When I speak in any college about estrangement, everybody knows what I mean, because they all feel estranged from their true being, from life, from themselves especially. But if I spoke of their all being Sinners, they would not understand at all. They would think, "I haven't sinned; I haven't drunk or danced," as in some fundamentalist churches, or whatever they understand as sin. But estrangement is a reality for them. Yet estrangement is what sin means — the power of estrangement from God. And that is all it means.

I believe that this is a possible solution to our problem, because the reality of Christian teaching about the human predicament is confirmed by every bit of writing, painting, or philosophizing of the entire twentieth century. And when we demonstrate this, and show how the great existential tragedies occur today, as in the past, we can make young people understand the human predicament. This is the point of my whole systematic theology.

Be very strict with your ministers or religious friends, when they throw these distorted and necessarily misunderstood symbols at you, and always trap them by asking, "What do you really mean?" And then you will find that it is perhaps possible to teach them the decisive lesson, namely, that these symbols can no longer be used in their distorted way.

Student: I was talking to a friend of mine who doesn't go to church, mainly because her parents didn't. And her sister happens to be radically antichurch in all ways, shapes. and forms. We got

talking about the same thing you are discussing now — estrangement rather than sin. She was truly excited about the idea and said, "Well, I have never heard anything of this sort in a church." And I said, "Well, I haven't either in any church I've gone to." Is there any example you can give of an organized church today that understands and presents this point of view?

Dr. Tillich: No, I do not believe that you can name a particular church. But there are many good young ministers everywhere in the country who make the attempt. And for this very reason they are often dismissed.

NOTES:

1. "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

2. In that year the Verdun Treaty broke up Charlemagne's empire.

3. Reinhold Niebuhr.

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Ultimate Concern - Tillich in Dialogue by D. Mackenzie Brown

Donald Mackenzie Brown is Chairman of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of California in Santa Barbara. This book was published in 1965 by Harper & Row, Publishers. This book was prepared for Religion Online by Harry W. and Grace C. Adams.

Fifth Dialogue

Professor: The formal topic for today is "Christianity and the Dialogue with Judaism and Islam."

Student: The first thing I have asked myself concerning this topic is: What would be the basis of a dialogue between Christianity and Judaism, and is a dialogue even possible with Islam? Of course there are certain things common to each. They have the same roots, we might say. They all arose from the Hebraic Old Testament tradition and were built to a large degree on what might be called a prophetic view of the Old Testament. They have a common sense of history, which is that history is not fulfilling in itself but that God is working through history to the fulfillment of his aims. This is in direct contrast to some of the other views of history of the times, such as the Greek or Roman, which considered history to be more or less a meaningless cycle.

All three believe in one universal God over all the world. Both the Christian and the Islamic faiths hold that their message is universal. And whereas the older Judaic tradition realizes that it is more or less an ethnic faith, still it believes that its God is the God of the world; there are no others.

Now these points in common should be recognized before we can have any type of discussion. But there are also, of course, many divergences and differences of viewpoint. For instance, Judaism gives primacy to the law over the prophets, and says that obedience to the law is the instrument for the fulfillment of God’s will. Christians subordinate the law, elevate the prophets, and substitute Christ as the road to salvation. And Islam stresses the will of God in salvation, almost to the exclusion of free will.

Islam is both a faith and a code. It seems to approach the outlook of Judaism in holding to a code of law. But there is a different emphasis. This code is an expression of faith, a submission

to God, rather than a road to the good life.

Both Christianity and Islam stress the importance of the individual and his means of salvation, not to the exclusion of the group, but over the group. Judaism has a unique capacity for keeping faith in both folk and nationalist groups as well as an attachment to the world. It might be said that the genius of the Judaic tradition has placed the destiny of the group at the center of its concern.

As the basis for dialogue, these are the points that come to my mind. I have a list of questions here as to the content of a dialogue between these religions. I would like to get some discussion on all of them from the group as well as from Dr. Tillich.

Is a Judeo-Christian Dialogue Possible?

Let us start with the first question. Judaism has always been an ethnic religion to a large extent, and there is a tension between its particularistic and universalistic elements. For instance, to the Jews there is one God over all the world, but he has a special relation to the Jewish nation. The Jews are the race chosen by God. They are unique; everybody in the world does not have to be a Jew. Judaism has therefore never tried to put forth the universality of its claims, but has recognized a certain validity in other religions. This has undoubtedly contributed to the possibility of a dialogue with Christianity. Now, Dr. Tillich, should Christianity judge itself in the light of this principle and could it broaden its capacity for tolerance by so doing?

Dr. Tillich: I believe it would be good if first a few of the Students talked to you and tried to answer some of these things.

Student: What is the validity in other religions that you have in mind?

Dr. Tillich: Could you please speak a little louder? The old man’s ears are not too good.

Student: What validity has Judaism recognized in other religions?

Student: Well, Judaism is an ethnic religion, and in Old Testament times all the other religions were ethnic religions. Now, whereas the Jews felt that their God was *the* God, still they recognized the right of other nations to express their religions in their own ways. So, even though they believed their own faith was the only proper religion, they saw some value in the other religions.

Student: Then it seems to me that this does not really contribute to the possibility of a dialogue with Christianity, because Jew and Christian alike, for centuries, have each declared the special validity of their own faith over and against others; and it seems to me that no real dialogue can

come about until they recognize that another religion may be completely valid in its own terms. Beyond this, Judaism might recognize that Christianity has validity even according to Judaism's standards, and the converse would have to apply to Christianity as well. It seems to me that until this stage is, realized, no real dialogue can come about on other than a superficial level.

Student: Well, hasn't this already happened somewhat, particularly among the theological faculties, as at Union Seminary and the Jewish Seminary in New York? There is a great deal of this dialogue, and they respect each other completely. Certainly Will Herberg, in his books, keeps acknowledging his debt to Reinhold Niebuhr and other Christian scholars. I don't think this dialogue is away out in the future.

Student: It seems to me that there is a natural dialogue, or basis for understanding, because the concept of God is similar in many ways in both Christianity and Judaism. God must stand for justice. And though the Jew's concept of God and justice is more closely related to the law, and the Christian more closely related to revelation through Christ, still there is a similarity and there is bound to be some dialogue. I wonder, too, about the difference among the Jewish groups themselves, because all Jews are not alike. There are Reform Jews and traditional Jews. More dialogue would be possible perhaps with the Reform groups.

Student: I wonder if our chief problem isn't the social and ethnic prejudice that exists among Christians, in America for instance. If we can remove this, we can move into a dialogue between the religions rather than a dialogue between the two groups as social groups.

Professor: Is it possible to have a dialogue so long as your religious definitions refer to the narrower concept of religion, as explained earlier by Dr. Tillich? Or can dialogue take place only when there is some recognition of his broad definition of religion as ultimate concern?

Dr. Tillich: Perhaps I may now offer some comments. The dialogue between Christian and Jew has gone on since the time of Jesus. It became very hot and radical in Paul's time. The converted Jews under the leadership of James, and partly Peter, attempted to consider Christianity as a Jewish sect within the Jewish law. Christianity was able to become a world religion only because of what Paul did for it, namely, breaking through the narrow limits of one of the many Jewish sects and groups which then existed, such as the Essenes and the movement of John the Baptist. They all were particular Jewish groups confined within the boundaries of the Jewish tradition. And the problem, of course, was intensified by the fact that the Christians, as my Jewish friends like to say, stole the Old Testament from the Jews and made it the basis of their own religion.

One may simply say that there has been a dialogue on all these questions ever since Tertullian's classic first dialogue in the third century. From the time when I returned from World War I in 1919 until yesterday, so to speak, when I wrote a letter to him, I have enjoyed a continuous dialogue with a non-Orthodox Jew who was not a member of any theological faculty. It has

been one of the most fruitful things I have experienced in my whole academic, theological, and religious life. He is a Professor of economics in the New School for Social Research in New York City. But we met long before we came to America, in the early twenties in Berlin. And this dialogue has been so rich because we have not just been repeating the same old problems, but have considered our fundamental differences, based on the same original prophetic tradition applied to all kinds of things. Our last dialogue, which was a very sharp exchange, concerned the meaning of space exploration; and in the discussion of this problem the fundamental differences again appeared. But our friendship has increased with each struggle, and so it should be.

In any case, I learned something very early by this experience, long before Reinhold Niebuhr expressed it publicly: that a mission of conversion directed toward the Jews living in the Western world — I am not sure about the others — is an impossibility. Here, definitely, missionary ideas have to be replaced by dialogue ideas and openness. If these Jews wish to approach us as Christians, we can always remain open, but we cannot press. I experienced a very interesting confirmation of this idea when I discussed it in Chicago two years ago in a room of highly educated rabbis. The son of Karl Barth, Markus Barth, who is a New Testament scholar, told me of his interpretation of the Letter to the Ephesians, which is, if not directly Paulinian, certainly secondarily so in origin. In it there is the idea of Jews and Christians living under the same ultimate covenant; and Markus Barth affirmed, from his New Testament point of view, the same interpretation. On this basis, I would say that dialogue is possible, although I have never carried on one with an Orthodox Jew in the same way.

Some of you have said that dialogue might be easier with a non-Orthodox Jew, and I believe that is true because bondage to the ritual in Orthodox Judaism makes a free approach much more difficult. But even there it is not impossible. Of course, from the Jewish point of view the same difficulty would exist with fundamentalist Christians or strongly ritualistic Christians such as Episcopalians. There would therefore certainly be some very difficult situations, but dialogue is otherwise quite possible.

Let me conclude this comment with a statement which I believe is very important for the whole of Christianity and for the problem of anti-Semitism and all that is implied in it. There is no special "Jewish" problem with those Jews with whom I have had conversations. They are not national or tribal in outlook; they all stand on the side of the prophetic tradition. The greatest thing the prophets did — especially Amos, of those whose writings we have — was to warn that God would cut his ties with the elected nation if it did not uphold justice. These words of Amos are one of the greatest turning points in the whole history of religion anywhere in the world, because for the first time a religion based on blood and soil, as was Judaism in common with other religions, is threatened with being cut off without damaging the position of its God. Previously, if a nation was lost, the god was also lost just because it was the god of that nation; the best thing that could happen to such a god was to be put into the Roman Pantheon or somewhere else as a subordinate god or demonic angel. But his divinity was lost, because his

sociological blood-and-soil basis was lost. Now Amos and the other prophets elevated Jehovah to an impregnable position, above the history of Israel, and thus saved the God of the Jews. So the Jewish God is not a problem.

The problem in a dialogue with the Jews is this: Has the Messiah, the announced "Anointed One" who will bring the new state of things, already come, namely, in Jesus in so far as he is the Christ; or do we have to wait for another one? Always then there is a very clear point at issue, and when we come to that point, my Jewish friend never gives in. He says that the world has not changed during all these centuries. The twentieth Christian century is the worst. Never have such terrible things happened in world history as in this century; and if after two thousand years the world has not changed, then this is the obvious proof that the Messiah has not yet come. So we must expect his coming.

From this follows a second difference my Jewish friend would emphasize, and so would most of the Jews whom I know theologically: the inner historical fulfillment, the time of justice. Here we have the inner connection between socialism (in the sense of social justice) and Judaism in the idea of justice being fulfilled in time and space. The true Christian idea is that the fulfillment is only fragmentarily in time and space, but in reality beyond time and space. And Christians interpret the death of Christ as the expression of this fact.

These are all preliminary answers, but perhaps they may give you some material to discuss out of the very intensive experience I have had regarding these problems.

Student: Well, considering the symbol of Christ does not Christianity state that the Christ existed in the world before the person of Jesus, as in the Gospel according to St John, where it is said that he was before the world? In terms of salvation, would it not be possible to say that the symbol of Christ, or his essence, was in the Jewish nation before his actual coming, and that salvation therefore does not necessarily begin with the advent of Christ on earth but existed before his incarnation in Jesus?

Dr. Tillich: That is a very interesting question. Shall I answer it or wait for you? If not, I may say this much: the early Christian idea was first an historical fact. We should really use the symbol of the Anointed One because the term Christ has become the proper name of a man whose first name was Jesus and whose second name became Christ.

Even this combination we must divide again into two different images. "Jesus" was a very ordinary name of the time; and some one of these many persons named Jesus was called the Christ, meaning the Anointed One. Now this idea is even older than the Old Testament. The "Anointed One" comes probably from Egypt, out of the royal house of course, and from there went to Israel — a very old symbol with a long history.

But to answer your question: the early church did not express this idea with the word "Christ,"

when it said that *he* was in the world. They used another, Hellenistic term, Logos. And they also called this principle *spermaticos,* meaning the Logos, which like a seed is and was everywhere in the world, since the beginning of the world and of mankind. This Logos *spermaticos* appeared as an empirical, historical person in the Christ, but revelation and salvation were always operating in history even before the empirical embodiment of the Logos in Jesus. And even this is not the end. After the historical event, the power of the Logos continued and continues in terms of new insights and new revelatory experiences Under the guidance of the Spirit. Here is a description of the Universality of Christianity.

The Logos idea is the greatest expression of this universality. In pointing this out you were right, but you should not have used the term Christ, or symbol of Christ, for the reality of what appeared in Jesus in time and space. The Logos idea has been and is effective today in all history. That was the early idea, and you are correct when you say that this is the universality of Christianity. The early church was much more universal than it proved in later centuries.

Is Judaism a More Tolerant Faith?

Student: Are there any more comments on what Dr. Tillich has said? If not, I'll proceed to the second question. Judaism has a unique capacity for retaining both folk and national elements, in addition to world allegiance. Thus Judaism has a definite contribution to make in the area of enlightened and intelligent nationalism and other forms of group relations. Can Christianity and Islam profit from Judaism's insights, or do the different structures of these religions make this difficult?

Dr. Tillich: I have the feeling that this question is a little bit difficult. At least it is for me, and perhaps for some of you also. Could you condense it into one or two sharply defined questions?

Student: Well, this goes back again to the ethnic and nationalistic roots of Judaism, and it seems to me that Judaism has quite a bit to say about group tolerance and national tolerance and so forth. I wonder if Christianity and Islam can profit by Judaism's experience?

Dr. Tillich: This problem is not a simple one historically speaking, because as long as the Jews were guests, so to speak, in other nations, the problem of tolerance was one-sided: Were *they* tolerated or not? The real problem is: Were the Jews tolerant earlier? And you will find many symptoms of tremendous intolerance in the people who returned from Babylon and established the new congregations. There was certainly not much tolerance in that period. Today we can watch what is happening in Israel. And there again I would say that the limits of tolerance are clearly risible. Even intolerance toward liberal Jews is a problem. And there are marriage problems, and many others, controlled and decided exclusively by the rabbis.

Student: Was there not a recent case where a person who claimed to be Jewish became a Catholic priest, and wanted to go to Israel to live? He claimed his right, and the Israel Supreme

Court, I think, is deciding now whether he may be allowed to enter or not. He claimed that his parents were Jewish and that therefore he was Jewish himself. And the court is trying to make up its mind as to whether Jewish citizenship is a matter of race or creed or what.[1]

Student: The Jewish people have been persecuted off and on for two thousand years, and as soon as they get their own home in Palestine they encounter about 600,000 Arabs who threaten them there. Now, although the Jews claim universal rights for all people who exist in the state of Israel, I would hesitate to say that we can learn ideas of tolerance from these people. I think that in relation to the Arabs, and in other ways, they have the same problems that we do as far as tolerance is concerned.

Dr. Tillich: Yes, I believe so too.

Student: So far as Judaism's ability to teach something to Christian groups is concerned, we have Judaism as a unique cultural community, or the Jews as the chosen people. I don't think that Christianity with its concept of the universality of the Christian message would want to become as solidified into a small group, because then its message or influence would not be able to attain its farthest reach.

At a higher level, I would say that the biblical idea of a unique ethical community, a spiritual community of mankind, is admirable. I think we can gain from this idea, but I don't think that at the lower levels Christianity would want to become an exclusive community.

Universalism in Christianity and Judaism

Dr. Tillich: Now, you see, here are two problems, and the first is very clear. I refer again to some words of Jesus, and the whole struggle of Paul against the narrow minded Jewish Christians. In this connection, the term *ecclesia* is a very interesting word. It is the Greek word for church, and it is derived from "calling out" — *ek,* out, plus *kalein,* to call. And it was used in the Greek city-states where the free citizens were called out from their houses by a crier, by somebody who went around and called them to the assembly of free citizens, which was the highest and ultimate authority in the city-states. And this word *ecclesia,* or assembly of free citizens, was transformed by early Christian writers into a term for church. Church thus means *ecclesia.* Paul wrote to the *ecclesia* in this and that city, which means that he wrote to the assembly of those who were called out. But in Pauline Christianity they were called out of all nations, and that is the difference: individuals out of *all* nations and not merely one nation. It is very interesting what power these Greek words of the classical tradition have transmitted to the Christian church.

Another word is *eleutheroi,* "the free ones." Now in the Greek city-state there would be a few thousand free people in a city like Athens, and the others were not free. The same concept of the

eleutheroi, or the free ones, was used by Christian writers to designate those liberated from demonic powers. Freed from the powers of evil, the demonic powers, they now formed the free ones in the assembly. But this is no longer the assembly of the city or of the nation. It is the assembly of God. Here is an example of Christian universalism as opposed to Jewish tribalism at this time.

Now to distinguish the second problem from the first: What about those who did not come to the *ecclesia?* In early Christianity they were considered not as simply lost but as not yet liberated. Of course, as Paul writes in Romans 1,[2] God did not let himself go unnoticed by the pagans, but they distorted his message. They had fallen under demonic power and had to be liberated, though they were not without God. The idea of the godlessness of people, in the sense of being left alone by God, did not exist at that time.

So let us remember these two early Christian ideas. First, there is the breaking through of the Jewish sacramental identity of blood, soil, and nation. Then, when the soil is taken away, what remains is simply the identity of religion, which is a kind of sacramental unity. Thus in Christianity the sacramental unity includes all those who are "elected" out of the nations and belong to the *ecclesia.*

Now our problem today, which has necessitated this discussion, is Christianity's relationship to other religions. But Christianity did not have to encounter any religion before the appearance of Islam. The other religions were not *really* other religions. Greek religion had long ago been criticized and undercut completely by the Greek philosophers themselves, and by the tragedians, who fought against the old gods. And there was nothing else. The other living religions, the Gnostic groups, were combinations and sectarian movements in which Christian and Jewish elements and others were fluxed. True, they had to be combated as Hellenistic mixtures, but not as really *different* religions. Mithraism could be included among these.

So there was no problem of tolerance as such. The problem then was simply to conquer the Roman Empire, which overshadowed all religions and which was itself the only Roman religion — namely, that of the emperor, or the genius of the emperor. It is therefore very important to realize what happened when Islam appeared. For now a real problem arose. A new religion, a living religion, a very powerful and distinct living religion, challenged Christianity. Up to this time such a situation had not occurred for the early church.

Professor: Dr. Tillich, do you find no universal elements in Judaism before Christianity?

Dr. Tillich: Oh, now you refer to the universalism of the prophets. Yes, we find in the voice of Abraham, "In thee all nations of the earth shall be blessed." That is certainly a universal idea. Having a special religion and staying within it was never a part of the prophetic religion. We even find a very universalistic trait (I believe in Second Isaiah), when Cyrus, the Persian king, is called "Messiah" because he is an anointed king used by Yahweh, the universal God, to

liberate Israel from the Babylonian captivity. So from the point of view of providential action, God was universal. He called an adherent of a quite different religion, Cyrus, to liberate Israel by conquering Babylon. That is the first universalism, but we must remember that this is not an acknowledgment of the religion of Cyrus. He became simply a servant of Yahweh and was called "my servant Cyrus," meaning that the god of Israel was the universal God. That is very clear in Second Isaiah. [Is. 45: l][3] But I do not see anything like this elsewhere in Old Testament history.

Professor: Can you say that the universalism which developed with Christianity was the result of the life of Jesus and not the result of the historical circumstances associated with the Roman Empire? Was it something which would naturally have developed in Judaism anyway?

Dr. Tillich: It is true that Judaism produced the first man to develop the Logos doctrine in terms of the phi1osophy of religion: the Jew Philo of Alexandria. His ideas were similar to those developed by the church fathers. My neighbor in Harvard has demonstrated in his well-known writings how very much the church fathers depended on Philo, the Jew, in their universalism.[4] But Philonic Judaism was never accepted by the actual Jewish tradition. It was a deviation during the Hellenistic period. And the Hellenization of Judaism was what later Jewish tradition reacted to most negatively. In Philo we have a phenomenon very similar to what we find among the early Christians. There was of course no relation between religion and the nation or the tribe. Moses was interpreted in terms of Plato, and this was all combined into a typically Hellenistic universalism.

Grace, Reconciliation, and Forgiveness

But the problem of universalism and legalism is not so simple. I think I made the point that the criticism of the Jews is that Christ cannot be the Christ because he has not changed the world. And in turn, the Christian criticism, the Pauline criticism, is that the law in Judaism binds us to that from which we are liberated by Christ, by grace. These are the two mutual criticisms that always remain. In dialogue, of course, they appear much more refined. In my last talk with Martin Buber about the law, I voiced this typically Pauline Christian criticism, and he answered, "That is not what the law means." Now certainly that may not be what the law means for *him*, but the law seems to be taken literally by orthodox Judaism. Buber is a mystically-minded Jew. He said that the commandments are like stars: We cannot fulfill them, but they show us the direction in which we should go. For example, "You shall not kill," or better, "You shall not murder." We don’t know what that really means, or in what ways we murder. How it is related to war or to criminal justice — we do not know for sure, and so we proceed as best we can. Other Jews have told me that the law is a help, but not a commanding power that presses us down and pushes us, as it did Paul and Luther, into despair, so that only the message of grace can save us from it. I believe that this is one of the points where the more modern-minded Jews have overcome much of the earlier Jewish legalism — not fully, but to a certain extent.

On the other hand, it is obvious that grace — let us say the "sin-forgiveness structure" or "justification-by-grace structure" of Pauline and Lutheran Christianity — is not the only important thing in Christianity. In fact, it has lost much the central importance it had for Paul and Luther, and even for myself. In the meantime, I have learned by life and thought that there are other problems, and that perhaps in Paul himself the central problem was the divine Spirit and not justification by grace. The divine Spirit fulfills, and so makes possible an approach to the law.

Student: Purely on a layman's level there is a book called *Marjorie Morningstar* by Herman Wouk, who wrote *The Caine Mutiny.* He is a novelist, and an Orthodox Jew, he says. And it's a fascinating book from an orthodox Christian point of view, for those who believe that all Jews are terribly unhappy and burdened. In this book you find that he is gloriously happy in his tradition and obeys the laws out of real choice, and is willing to identify himself with the history of the Jewish people, not out of constraint or by the force of the traditional.

Dr. Tillich: Yes, I have been told this by many Jewish friends. But the problem is: What is the inner reaction if we feel that we are sinners, that we have done a terrible wrong? What then? And Luther, especially clear on this point, is more modern. How do we experience a merciful God? That was Luther's question, out of which the whole Reformation came. Now what does a Jew do with this question? His essential problem shows itself then, because he has no basic answer to this.

There is much to be said about the psychology of this situation. As long as the prophetic message was directed to the nation as a whole once could always say: Now this nation has failed, God has punished the nation, but there are remnants which will do better, and so on. That was comparatively easy, although it seemed hard at the time. But the problem for the individual human being remains. We already find the beginning of this personal problem in the later Psalms. The earlier Psalms usually mean Israel when they say "I," but in the later Psalms really individual piety appears, and the hope that God may forgive us all.

The decisive difference, however, lies here. The real question is: Is there a new reality on which we can rely as the power of reconciliation? Judaism does not wholly lack this experience, of course. Jews have their Day of Reconciliation, the loftiest of their celebrations, but it is not elaborated in their daily life as it is in Christianity. There is the difference, and it should not be blurred.

Professor: Does Buber solve that problem?

Dr. Tillich: I have never talked with Buber about just that point. I should have, perhaps, but I have never had the occasion.

Student: Could you explain a little how it is elaborated in the daily life of a Christian — the idea

of mercy and love and forgiveness?

Dr. Tillich: Yes, now, for example, the prayer of "Our Father . . . forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors," or the prayers in every service in which there is a kind of confession of having done evil, not having done what one should do, and then the plea for divine forgiveness. This is very central in Christianity, and bad conscience has to be overcome in many people by the image of the crucified as the symbol that God is willing to forgive. As a theological expression it remains quite open, is never precisely delineated. But psychologically it is true, and for two thousand years has had this effect on innumerable persons. Because of it I often feel a gap between myself and even my best Jewish friends. There seems to me to be a danger among them of self-justification — let us call it — by virtue of their good life. I know many Jews, and I would say that their good life is often *very* good. And nevertheless, there are also Christians whose good lives are very good; but in the Christian there is always the feeling that we can be good only in the light of grace, of having been forgiven. Among Jews there is a stronger belief that we can be good by our own wills, by our own personal obedience to the law.

Student: But what are we being forgiven for? Must we have forgiveness?

Dr. Tillich: For instance, for not having done what we should have done in terms of love, of agape; for hurting somebody, or murdering somebody. There are people who murder other people and then cry for forgiveness. If you visit the prisons you will find that.

In ordinary life also there are those who feel that they have wasted much of their life, the best of themselves, and who want to overcome their own remorse for it. We do not need to be forgiven for little trespasses, but for the state of mind these trespasses express.

Student: Doesn’t Catholicism somehow blur this idea of personal mercy and forgiveness with its absolute laws and code? It is so much more specific than that of the Protestants.

Dr. Tillich: Therefore there was the Protestant revolt against a Catholicism which made those laws so rigid that their spirit was almost indistinguishable from the legalistic attitude of Judaism. But the Reformation has deteriorated in the same way, and today we have a Protestantism which is itself a kind of rigid moralism, equally bad. So the message of grace is always necessary; I like to call it "acceptance." Again and again, reform movements at every stage of church history have been absolutely necessary because it is the character of religion in the narrow sense of the word to become legalistic.

Progress in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam

Student: Most people today, manufacturers especially, seem to think that history is just a matter of coming to the time of the industrial revolution. We are putting out bigger and better cars, and

they fall apart faster, and we sell more of them. This, it seems to me, is the general idea of progress today. The whole view of history is getting more and more money for yourself and your kids, and enjoying a more prosperous family life, and so on. It seems rather far, to me, from the idea of gaining wisdom in time. I would like to ask if this could perhaps be the expression of original sin in history, that we can only go so far? Can history approach no closer to eternity than it is now, or was two thousand years ago? Does only the outward physical situation change?

Student: I think that humanity has gained much wisdom. We have eliminated many problems, and eventually we'll eliminate more.

Student: What, for instance?

Student: Well, consider psychology. No doubt a hundred years ago, or two hundred years ago, people encountered personal problems they couldn't handle, and they'd go to some Puritan minister in Salem, or something, and he would give them some absolute answer that he got from revelation or his understanding of the Bible. And he handed this out to be the absolute truth and wouldn't qualify it in any way. Now science, through psychology and medicine, has shown that perhaps we can reexamine these things and come closer to their true meaning.

Professor: I wonder if our visiting Professor would like to comment on that?

Professor: Yes, I think we've seen some progress in psychology, thanks to Freud. I think Freud developed a method of achieving insight. There were certainly ways of coming at these problems prior to Freud, but not within the context of science. It seems to me that science has developed approaches to wisdom that do represent progress.

One aspect I am very much interested in is the thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a theologian in Germany who died under Hitler, and who spoke in very progressive terms about the development of the modern world. One of his phrases is "the world come of age." All of this is rather abstrusely handled by Bonhoeffer, and one wonders how he really understands the notion of progress in this respect. In any event, he wishes to affirm the advances that are being made, rather than reacting against them in the name of religion out of a longing to return to an earlier period when religion was much more manifest. He is very clear in suggesting the ways in which ostensibly nonreligious means are taking over and doing the job traditional religion used to do.

Student: May I refer to Dr. Tillich's statements in his writings that science and religion are different realms? What I am getting at is the idea of our spiritual progress rather than just material progress. Am I on the right track, Dr. Tillich? There is a dichotomy between scientific language and the language of the soul and spirit.

Dr. Tillich: Yes, but now may I hear two more comments? And then I shall develop my idea of progress. You have derived the idea of progress from the Hebrew-influenced religions, and that is justified, for only on the basis of the Old Testament have we any idea of progress in the modern sense. We did not have it in Greek humanism, and we don't have it anywhere in Asia. But I would like to speak on the subject after other students have commented.

Student: You were expressing some idea about progress in terms of our spiritual relationship to eternity. It seemed to me that Dr. Tillich talked about this very meaningfully in *The Dynamics of Faith,* when he discussed the fact that human beings have to recognize that they are finite and that, if they really are believers, they are concerned with something that is infinite, and that there can never be a complete union between the two.[5] The finite and the infinite will never meet. Now what progress can there be beyond this point? You can only come so close to infinity.

Student: Can't you say a little more about what you mean?

Student: I can't really say anything more. That's why I asked the question.

Student: Well, it's confusing to me.

Student: I suppose I could say that our feeling of separation from the ultimate ground of our being, or whatever you want to call it, is what I meant.

Student: According to my understanding of Freudian psychology, our guilt feelings frequently come from a process of change. If this is so, then guilt feelings come from the failure to change, or to change rapidly enough.

Student: I'm really not discussing change at all. I'm referring to Dr. Tillich's concept of the feeling of separation, or estrangement, from the ground of our being. I'm not talking about guilt as such, or not being able to keep pace with the group.

Student: We *are* talking about the same things. If you don't wish to call it guilt, then call it the feeling of estrangement. Nonetheless, psychology, as I understand it, does suggest that this feeling of estrangement comes from rapid change.

Dr. Tillich: Now we are already deep in many questions concerning the guilt problem and the progress problem.

First let us consider guilt. It is difficult for me, as a German, to discuss guilt in such general terms, because in Germany the word applies to somebody potentially or really guilty, who then comes before a judge and is pronounced guilty or not by the judge, or sentenced to punishment.

But "guilt" in English also has another meaning, the mean of feeling guilty. I try to make a sharp distinction, whenever I speak on this subject, between guilt feeling and objective guilt — that is, being actually responsible for something wrong. The English language has unfortunately confused "guilt" with "guilt feeling," and so all discussion concerning guilt becomes quickly confused.

On the basis of this distinction there is the experience which I call "misplaced guilt feeling." This is also my answer to the comment about Freud at the end of our last discussion. Freudian salvation reaches only as far as misplaced or neurotic guilt feelings. Neurotic guilt feelings, by unconscious processes, often produce a sense of guilt which has no foundation in reality whatever. It often proves to be the best way of avoiding and not having to face real guilt, which would give us genuine guilt feelings and the need to overcome them. So I would answer an earlier question by saying that psychoanalytic salvation *is* a "salvation"; but it is a medical salvation from misplaced guilt feelings and not salvation from the objectively justified feeling of having acted wrongly against what one knows to be right. This is a primitive way of expressing it; a much more refined way is the term "estrangement," namely, estrangement from our true being.

The question of salvation has another dimension — the dimension of forgiveness, or grace, or acceptance. I would avoid the words "original sin" completely. I am glad that Dr. Niebuhr, in our last theological discussion, said he had also come to this conclusion. Although he reintroduced that term into this country, he has now given it up because the misunderstandings in connection with it wreak too much havoc. But the tragic estrangement of mankind (that is what the words actually mean) is a reality we cannot deny. That is one side of your problem.

The other side concerned the question of progress, which is intimately related to it. And my basic statement here is that progress is limited by the freedom of every newborn individual. Every new individual is not only born into certain conditions, but also with a freedom to reject or accept these conditions; and this is his capacity for moral decision.

So in every individual we have a new beginning, and the necessity for new grace. Progress is possible in all things that can be refined by activities like science or medicine or technology, and even psychological research to a certain extent. But it cannot go beyond these, because after human conditions are raised to a new high, other forms of estrangement occur at a more refined level but with no less guilt. Even the law acknowledges that the guilt of a man who steals because he is hungry is minimal, while the guilt of somebody who steals because he is a rich banker and can steal millions by fraud is very heavy. In the same way, in our society today nobody steals the silver spoons when he is invited out to dinner; but there may be attitudes expressed towards one’s neighbor during dinner which are equally immoral, and this is the reason for my insisting that it is a matter of the refinement of the exercise of moral freedom.

And this relates also to science. What science can do is to give us insights into handling

realities, including some levels of our psychological makeup. That is quite possible, but science (and here I think I would contradict our guest professor) cannot give us wisdom, because wisdom is, if we consider the wisdom literature of Greece and the Old Testament, not a technical achievement, but a divine power which tries to show us the ultimate problems of our existence. Later it was termed the Logos. The Logos is, so to speak, the successor of Old Testament wisdom.

In the Middle Ages, wisdom was consciously confronted with science in the struggles between the Dominicans and the Franciscans, the Augustinians and the Aristotelians. The Augustinians argued that, of course, the new methods introduced by Aristotle would increase our *scientia*, our science, but would not increase our *sapientia*, our wisdom, and would in fact be damaging to it. And I think it was a true prophecy when the Franciscan theologians said that in the whole development of the coming centuries we would lose something of the *sapientia* of the earlier periods of history, although we would gain immeasurably, of course, in *scientia.*

Now then, there is another question which is important for our topic: How closely, in contrast to the Asiatic societies and the primitives, do the three history-minded religions agree on the idea of progress? I must say that I do not see progressivism in Islam in any sense you have described. There is no impetus to change the whole of reality; hence the incredible resistance of Islamic feudalism, to any transformation. There is now one man — like him or not — Nasser, who seems to be working against this line and who stands, as far as I know, very much in conflict with the Islamic leaders in his own country because he is trying to introduce something of progress.

In both Judaism and Christianity we have two views of history which come nicely together in the last book of the Bible, namely, the inner-historical fulfillment, which is the main emphasis of the prophets, and the suprahistorical fulfillment of history, which is the main emphasis of the apocalyptics, those seers of the end from whom the last book of the Bible, the Revelation of John, is taken. This is a thoroughly late Jewish book with Christian amendments, let’s say. It comes from the apocalyptic literature, an extensive literature which foresaw the end of the world, just as it is described in the last book of the Bible and also in some speeches of Jesus about the last days in Mark 13. [4-33] Now these two historical attitudes ride side by side through the whole of church history. The official church was always interested in the suprahistorical, while the sectarian movements, the social-revolutionary movements, were all most concerned with inner-historical fulfillment.

Sometimes a third attitude arose which tried to combine the inner-historical or fragmentary fulfillment with the suprahistorical complete fulfillment. This could be seen, for instance, in our religious socialist group in the period after World War I, when we recognized that the churches were only interested in the salvation of individuals, leaving history, generally speaking, to the devil, although they did try to influence it to a certain extent by Jewish-Christian principles of justice and agape. But the idea of the transformation of society was far from that. By contrast,

the revolutionary movements of the Western world, first the bourgeois revolution and then that of the laboring classes, had only the inner-historical idea and were completely cut off from the vertical life, from the suprahistorical idea. What we tried to do in our German movement was to combine the two.

In any case, I would agree with you that the inner-historical fulfillment is always fragmentary and in some ways anticipatory. The real fulfillment of the Kingdom of God is when God "is all to all," as Paul says. This is eternal life and transcends time, past, present, and future. It is simply beyond time.

This, finally, is my solution to your question, which I give you to think about: Every belief in an inner-historical fulfillment leads to metaphysical disappointment — not only psychological disappointment, but a much more fundament disappointment, namely, disillusionment with any belief in something finite which was expected to become something infinite. Our history as a whole has amply demonstrated this disillusionment. On the other hand, the merely transcendent idea of individual salvation amounts to abandoning the world to hell, not caring for the problems of justice and thus leaving them to antireligious movements such as nineteenth- and twentieth-century Communism and Fascism. We of the religious socialists tried to unite these two geometrical dimensions: the horizontal and the vertical, the social and individual demands of religion.

NOTES:

1. The Court excluded Oswald Rufeism on grounds that, although originally of Jewish background, he was now a Catholic Carmelite friar and so was not Jewish by faith and could not claim citizenship without becoming naturalized. See *Newsweek*, Dec. 3, 1962, p. 69.

2. Vs. 20: "For the invisible things of him from the Creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: . . ."

3. "Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; . . ."

4. "My neighbor in Harvard" is Prof. Harry A. Wolfson, author of *Philo*, 2 vols. (rev. ed.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1948) and *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956).

5. E.g., pp. 66—76.

return to religion-online

Ultimate Concern - Tillich in Dialogue by D. Mackenzie Brown

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Sixth Dialogue

Professor: We shall begin this session with a discussion of the meaning of time and history in Christianity and other religions.

The Kairos in Christianity and Hinduism

Student: Dr. Tillich, would you give us a definition of the *kairos?* You have said in your writing that we are entering into a period of the kairos. Would you tell us what are the predominant aspects of our culture that we can relate to the eternal? What are the things that indicate that we are moving into a period where the eternal may insert itself dramatically into history?

Dr. Tillich: Now this really demands a lengthy statement, not only because you have asked a half dozen questions, but also because this is a very difficult concept. Perhaps I can first say a few words about the Greek language, which has given us two meaningful words in this connection. One word is *chronos.* Chronic, chronography, chronometer, all come from that Greek word. They refer to watch time, to clock time. *Chronos* is the measurable time which runs according to the movement of the stars. The second term is *kairos.* This refers to a qualitatively different and unique moment in this time process. So the first is a quantitative word and the second a qualitative one. Perhaps the closest English can come to kairos would be the good word "timing." This word is an English treasure. German has no such concept.

"Timing" presupposes some qualitative element in relation to the temporal process. "Now is the right time" to do something, for example, is what kairos originally meant. But when this word was taken over by Christianity, it did not refer to any special moment which might involve almost anything in daily life, but only to moments important for the historical process itself. In symbolic phraseology, it referred to "divine timing." It referred to the time which God thinks is the right time, to that moment when God sends his son. So kairos is the right moment, not any moment, but the particular moment of God’s choosing, when time and history are fulfilled. And

"fulfilled" means that certain conditions are then present in which his son could be received. He could not have come at any other time, because then the conditions would not have been fulfilled. When they are fulfilled, God sends his son. This is biblical or Paulinian thought. In the words of Jesus, and before that in the words of the Baptists, we find the term applied to the "coming of the Kingdom of God." It is "at hand." And if it comes, history is fulfilled. This is the "great kairos."

Professor: Dr. Tillich, it is interesting that in the Hindu tradition Vishnu is supposed to come whenever the conditions are right. He is supposed to manifest himself and come down to earth as an avatar. And his manifestation as Krishna comes at the precise moment. And in some future time Kalki will also come down at the precise moment that he is needed.

Dr. Tillich: Very interesting! I did not know that they had the same idea. It is very interesting. I am happy to hear this, because it confirms the difference in meaning between the two kinds of time.

Jesus himself applies this idea also — or is supposed to have applied it — to his own biography when he says, "My kairos has not yet come (namely, to go to Jerusalem and to die). I still have other things to do, but there will be a moment in which I have to die." [Matt. 16:21-23] So kairos in Christianity has a connotation beyond the original Greek "timing." In Christian usage — and also, as we have just heard, in the Hindu usage — it is a state of things in the world which makes the appearance of something divine possible. There are always those two aspects — the conditions themselves and the intervention of something beyond time and space, coming into time and space.

Professor: May I inquire at this point as to the nature of these conditions in the Christian concept, because in the Hindu they must be very bad — so desperate that divine intervention is needed. Is this true of the Christian, or is the reverse the case?

Dr. Tillich: Yes. The situation is clearly described in the apocalyptic literature which decisively influenced Christian thinking. In the apocalyptic literature we have ideas which are, according to my slight knowledge, very close to some Indian ideas, namely, that the world is aging, and has come now to its old age. So a new cycle must begin.

The idea of a new birth, renewal, regeneration, was not originally applied to individual human beings, as at present. We now speak of people who are reborn or experience a second birth, but in biblical literature we still find the consciousness of what rebirth originally meant — a transformation of the state of the universe, of everything: a transformation, a rebirth, a regeneration, a renaissance. Renaissance means "being born again." In the fourteenth century the ancient traditions became known again in their full dimensions, and caused the state of things in the whole of Christianity to undergo rebirth.

Thus the word "Renaissance" is very often misunderstood as signifying the rebirth of the ancient traditions. But this was only the tool; what was really meant was the rebirth of society. And therefore in the beginning of both movements, Renaissance and Reformation, the two words were often exchanged. The identifying factor in both was the feeling that the world had become so bad that a rebirth, a renaissance — a *rinascimento* in Italian — was absolutely necessary.

In this sense, the apocalyptic literature expected the coming of the Son of Man, which was a more important term in that literature than "Messiah." They expected his coming because of the aging of the world. And part of that aging was the growth of demonic possessiveness. In later Judaism the feeling that everything was full of demons — destructive demons or evil powers — was very strong. And we see in the Gospel stories that it was the continuous task of Jesus to throw the demons out. This was the late Judaistic world view at that time. And from Paul we have, in Romans 1, a description of the state of society in his time, one of most devastating human corruption in every respect. [Vss. 21-31] All evil powers were present.

But elsewhere in biblical literature I do not find many descriptions of a situation where a Messiah is necessary. On the contrary, a positive attitude is presented, especially in the Fourth Gospel. There we see it is not so much that Judaism is ready for rebirth, but that paganism is ready for it. And in Judaism there are special groups, the so-called "quiet ones" or "waiting ones" (they are called both names in the New Testament) who wait for the kairos. The state of waiting, both in some Jewish groups out of which most of the disciples came, and in paganism as a whole, is the positive side of the preparation for the kairos, as the corruption of the world is the negative. I do not know whether this waiting element can be found in Hinduism. It would be very interesting to find out. In any case, the kairos is not a merely negative concept. The conditions for it are not only evil circumstances, but also the situation of waiting or expectation.

Now in the situation after World War I a group of people, most of whom had participated in it, at least indirectly, sought each other out — I was in Berlin at the time — and found that they had one fundamental problem to solve. On the one hand, the labor movement, the socialist movement, had come to power in postwar Germany after the breakdown of the empire. And this movement, the Social Democratic Party and its ideas, was utopian. They believed in the coming of the socialist society, the classless society, in the very near future. On the other hand, there were the Lutheran churches. Only Lutheranism is a really religious power in Germany, practically speaking, although in western Germany there is some influence of Calvinism. And these Lutheran churches were not interested in history at all. They were interested in saving individuals from an evil world. So the important element of Calvinism — to subject the world to the will of God — did not exist in German piety. The world was evil. That was the basis for what in Germany was called "conservative," a term that has no connection with the misuse of the name for fascist movements today in this country. These conservatives held that true social change was impossible and should not even be attempted, because the world would be evil no matter what happened. What was important was to rescue individuals out of this vale of tears

and bring them into eternal blessedness. In this kind of thought I was educated myself.

Professor: Dr. Tillich, among the Lutherans you did not have the "waiting" element?

Dr. Tillich: Not at all. We had it of course in the Social Democratic movement on a secular basis, but in Lutheranism just the opposite.

Professor: Well, then, I would say — to answer the question you raised a short time ago — that with some exceptions the Indian tradition would be more like the Lutheran. There would be this attempt to elevate individuals. But nothing is expected before the end of the cycle that will save the whole thing, because the world in its present cycle inevitably goes downhill.

Dr. Tillich: Yes, I noticed that immediately when I discussed these matters with the Buddhists in Japan. They have the same feeling toward history. There is no futuristic element in Hinduism or Buddhism. Lutheranism was, in this respect, very close to this point of view, except that the concept of heaven was quite different. Blessedness or salvation did not involve going over into oneness, but retained and preserved the individual soul. Otherwise, you are absolutely right. I have always felt a certain similarity between Indian tradition and some elements of the Lutheran tradition.

But I myself, influenced by the German socialist movement, and here in this country by the Calvinist sectarian attitude, which is quite anti-Lutheran in this respect, have learned to accept a meaning for history. And in our effort to bridge the tremendous gap in Germany between the utopian hopes of the socialist movement and the hopeless conservative transcendental attitude of Lutheranism, we adopted the belief that there was now a historical moment in which something could be done; bourgeois society would be shaken to its very foundations, and something new would come. And we felt that this "new" should not be seen in the light of the socialist movement as something merely inner-historical and produced by man and reason and so on. We felt that if the transcendent element, the dimension of the ultimate, was lacking the new movement would go astray, as it certainly did. And so we tried to save it from this fate by giving the history-transforming hope and expectation of the socialists a new depth: the dimension of the religious. That was the meaning of religious socialism, and we had the feeling that the breakdown of Germany, Austria, and central Europe in World War I had given us the opportunity which we would never have had without it. Therefore, although German, we did not regret our defeat in the war at all. We greeted the defeat as something which gave, first to central Europe and then perhaps beyond, a new vision of society, just as people did after World War II. This was the meaning of kairos for us.

Perhaps I have spent too much time on this one question, but I think it is a very fundamental problem, and basic to my whole philosophy of history.

Student: You said that the concept of the kairos involves conditions in the world which are just

right for some event that comes from beyond time and space. And this implies or connotes a coming together of the infinite and the finite. Is that a valid conclusion?

Dr. Tillich: That is valid. But I would not say a "coming together"; I have always called it more dynamically a "breaking in" of the infinite into the finite. It is the same thing that happened again and again in the history of the Old Testament — a breaking in of the prophetic. For example, the siege of Jerusalem and the interpretation of it by Isaiah and then the Babylonian captivity were "kairotic" events for the history of Judaism.

Of course, a kairos cannot be calculated. We cannot say, "Now here comes the kairos." We can only find ourselves in the situation and act. Our action then is a risk. But everything that the prophets did was a risk, as was also what we attempted in Germany. Yes, there was some real prophetic spirit in the twenties, a spirit critical of society, and the spirit of working for and expecting the new society. In the short run we were proved absolutely wrong; we were completely destroyed by Nazism. But in the long run we were right. Being "right" is always a bit different, however, from what one originally had in mind. It is the same with Old Testament prophecy.

Student: At the present time in Europe I suppose the vision is for a united Europe, first in an economic sense and then in a political sense. Would you call this the "breaking in" of the infinite? I don’t understand the concept of the "breaking in" of the infinite when you apply it to a particular case.

Dr. Tillich: You see, we cannot say this from outside the situation. That is what I meant by the impossibility of calculation. We cannot say, "There is now a kairos. The infinite is now breaking in."

And I do not see, in our present moment in history, the characteristics of what we call kairos. We now have a very rational political movement brought about by the pressures of World War II, but without ultimately new religious principles. It is a possibility, an attempt at a solution, which may or may not be good, since it weakens the unity of the free world. And there is nobody I know who has the inner feeling of kairos about it.

Of course, let us agree that, should Germany and France really become friends forever, then an almost miraculous thing will have occurred, in a real sense a breaking in of the infinite, since one of the greatest curses of European history will have been overcome. This was created in the year 843 by the Treaty of Verdun, when the empire of Charlemagne was divided into a western and an eastern half, with a small comparatively weak territory stretching from the North Sea to the Mediterranean. This division led to interminable wars in Europe. I myself experienced three of them between France and Germany. Of course, as a boy I did not actually experience the first, but my education and upbringing were so full of it that I almost felt as though I had lived through the years 1870 and 1871. That was fifteen years before I was born, but we German

children lived that war. I knew every battle, the date of every battle, every army corps that fought in this or that place. Our participation was inbred.

Then came World War I, and then World War II. Three wars took place between France and Germany in a relatively short time. So if this curse were to be overcome now it would be a providential situation which you could connect with eternity. But personally I do not stand in that situation, and so cannot say. I do not have the feeling that the people fighting for it have the same sense of a new reality that might spread over all Western society as we had earlier. What we felt had nothing to do with particular national problems. As I told you, we didn't even mind the defeat in World War I.

Only if we feel this new European movement in terms of a providential event, the overcoming of a curse of more than a thousand years, can we say it is something in which eternity, the kairos, plays a role.

The Kairos and the Cross

Student: Dr. Tillich, I would like to ask what role Christianity would play in this idea of kairos in our society today. What validity does the symbol of Christ and his cross have that the symbols of other religious movements do not have? What is the uniqueness, you might say, of the symbol of Christ?

Dr. Tillich: Now we must be very careful here in our formulation of these ideas. If we use the word "symbol," we must make it clear that the name Jesus Christ combines an historical statement with a symbolic name. And these two should be distinguished, and neither left out. The symbolic name of course is the "Anointed One," the Messiah, which in Greek is the *Christos*, meaning "anointed." And it is a symbol much older than even Judaism, not to speak of Christianity. It comes probably from Egypt, as I have said, and expressed the hope that out of the royal family somebody would be born who would be the king of peace for the world and who would be, as kings were, anointed for that purpose.

These are all difficult historical statements, and we cannot be absolutely sure about them, but that probably was the basis. The concept was then taken into the Jewish prophetic tradition and later given a much more transcendent character in the apocalyptic literature. The name "Christ" was replaced by "Son of Man" in the Book of Daniel and in the literature that followed.

Now the great paradox of Christianity is that this symbol was applied to a man who was probably born in the town of Nazareth and lived an ordinary life there. And one day he set forth out of Nazareth, probably in connection with the movement of John the Baptist, which had roots in the Dead Sea sects, now more familiar to us because of the scrolls. And from that time he himself began to preach a message and to collect disciples. This is our simple historical basis. Then one day, either during his life or after his death — this we do not know with

complete historical certainty — he was called "the Messiah." I am inclined to believe that the central scene of the whole synoptic tradition, the first three Gospels, is the scene in Mark in which Jesus asks the disciples, "Who do you say that I am? Others say some things, but what do you say?" And then Peter says, "Thou art the Christ." Now it is quite possible that Peter made this statement in an ecstatic way, and the others followed him. That is an example of the relationship between history and symbol.

Of course, two symbols had enjoyed importance before that time — "Son of Man" and "Son of God." The Son of Man was a figure of a human being standing before God and then sent by God to smash worldly empires and establish the Kingdom of God. Then the second symbol, Son of God, was also applied to Jesus. This had nothing to do with later dogmatic formulations, but originally described the most intimate relation to God of him who was elected by God. And his election in the earliest tradition was connected with his baptism.

Professor: Did you mean also to ask, "What is the peculiar value and meaning of the cross as a symbol today?"

Student: Yes, that would be it.

Dr. Tillich: It is not the cross, but the cross of the Christ that is the symbol. Not *anybody's* cross, but the cross of Christ. Innumerable people were crucified at that time, and crucified as Messiahs. But "the cross" for us means what followed in connection with the Messiah symbol. The Messiah was supposed to be "he who brings the new aeon" and at the same time overcomes the Roman Empire and liberates the elected nation, the Jews. There the problem arises. Can an individual *as an individual* be "he who is sent by God" as the bringer of a new reality, a new being, a new aeon? "New aeon" is perhaps the best translation, since these ideas were taught in Judaism in terms of whole historical periods. A new period starts with him.

There the great danger of idolatry, or of demonization, immediately arises. This we must keep in mind first of all, because here is the point where I believe we can recognize a superiority of the Christian symbol over other religious symbols. The basic superiority is the radical negation of the idolatrous possibility by the cross. What were the possibilities? One was that he who was declared to be the Messiah, in the sense I have described, could now become a political revolutionary, a powerful leader in conflict with the Roman Empire. The idea was that with the help of God he would conquer it, although the few Jews, of course, never could dream of conquering the Roman Empire by themselves. They could dream of it only in terms of an interference by God. Here Jesus stood before and between the alternatives. If he had decided for the political revolution, we would not know anything about him, or as little as we know about other Messianic movements which were political and failed completely after a short time.

The disciples stood on the side of the political idea. In the same story in which he is called the Christ, we witness this great scene: Jesus says, in the very moment he is declared to be the

Messiah, "Now I must go to Jerusalem and die." And in this moment, political Peter says to him, "This should not happen to you." And then Jesus uses the sharpest word he ever used, even in all his sharp attacks on Pharisees and priests. He never called them "Satan," but he did call Peter, his greatest disciple, "Satan." And he says, "Get behind me!" Why? Because in his words Peter says precisely what, in the symbolic story of the temptation in the desert, the devil also says to Jesus: "Show your divine power. Use it for yourself, politically." That was the temptation. And because Jesus overcame this temptation, that alone has made him the Messiah. Of course, this description presupposes the intimate relationship with God expressed in the symbol "Son of God" or the other symbols. All of them have the same meaning ultimately.

Thus my preliminary answer to your question is that the cross symbolizes the conquest of the demonic temptation to power which we meet in every religion, in every religious leader, and in every priest. And I would add that the Roman church has not properly understood the meaning of this scene and therefore the meaning of the cross.

Professor: How has it distorted it?

Dr. Tillich: By making itself, as the church represented by the pope, something absolute which does not have to die but which maintains an exclusive structure and validity.

Student: Something has always bothered me in this particular relationship between God and Christ. And my question is implicit in the topic you are now discussing. Why was it necessary for Jesus to be tempted in the wilderness by God if Jesus was the Son of God? If God sent him down here as the Son of God, he would have known the answer immediately without any testing.

Dr. Tillich: Yes, but now you are describing the superstitious concept of the Son of God. And in that light, of course, your question is absolutely justified. The church has fought this distortion continuously, and has always been defeated. "Monophysitism" is what dogmatic terminology calls this interpretation of the Christ. Officially, Monophysitism has been rejected by the church again and again. The word means "one nature": *Monos* is "one" and *physis* "nature," and the term is applied to those who insisted that Christ had only one nature, the divine nature, without a full human nature. The refined Greek phrases are not necessary; they belong to an examination of the history of dogma. They are very interesting when you understand their larger meaning, but are not really important for our discussion here. If we accepted the Monophysite interpretation, however, which takes away the full humanity of Christ, in opposition to the official dogma of the church, then your question would be justified. But the church has always maintained with Paul, who was very clear about this, that Jesus was also human and therefore stood under the law, because human existence is existence under the law.

My second comment on your question is that you are tempted to understand the term Son of God in the Greek sense, meaning "offspring of the god" — not always only of one god, though

many of them were sons of the highest god, Zeus. These "sons" were usually born of human females and became "sons of god." But for our purposes this mythological idea is absolutely impossible, and would have seemed so, from the point of view of Judaism, to both Jesus and his disciples. So let us forget that concept.

I believe that a truer interpretation is given by the voice that comes down to John or to Jesus — the story varies in different texts — in the scene of the baptism: "Thou art my beloved Son. Today I have chosen thee." These words have nothing to do with a metaphysical or mythological form of son. If we strip away the mythology, and read simply what the gospel stories say, we have a picture of a man who is driven by the divine Spirit to his function, to his message, to his work as Messiah, and who anticipates the coming of the Kingdom of God in his message. We see that the stories refer to one who realizes that this Kingdom of God is not the kingdom of the Jewish people conquering the Roman world, but a kingdom "not of this world," as the Fourth Gospel has Jesus say in his confrontation with Pilate. Is this not a clear answer to your question? Jesus was a full man; he was full of weakness, full of *eros.* He was involved in all human tragedies, but he maintained his relationship to God.

Sainthood and Experience of the Kairos

Professor: Dr. Tillich, dare we go beyond that and say that this term "Son of God," in that sense, is applicable to many human beings? There is a statement by Meister Eckhart that it is the duty of everyone to become the son of God, or God’s only son. Is that relationship or status an absolutely unique thing in the person of Jesus, or is it something that could happen to anyone when the kairos enters?

Dr. Tillich: Ah, there let us tread cautiously. When Meister Eckhart speaks thus, he indicates the Logos, which for him is present in every human soul. And in so far as the Christ, in later concepts after the Fourth Gospel, was also called the Logos, the universal principle of divine self-manifestation, Meister Eckhart as a mystic certainly would insist that this divine self-manifestation was universal and that the Christ can be born, or the Logos developed, in every individual. The symbolism is a little different here. We are all called "children of God." And classical theology, at least during the first seven hundred years, accepted the Platonic phrase for the *telos* of man, for the inner aim of all human beings, namely, *homoiosis to theou kata to dynaton.* This very famous term means "becoming similar to God as much as possible" and was always quoted in the later ancient world as the Platonic definition of *telos.* This means becoming godlike, not God himself, but godlike. And in this sense you justly refer to Eckhart.

But our original question remains: Can there be in the development of history a preferred moment, a moment of unique character, in which the world situation manifests itself? Now it is my Christian conviction that there can be, for I see in the image of the Christ in the New Testament a revelatory and a critical power, which may have been approached elsewhere, but which always remains the ultimate criterion. For this reason I have called Jesus as the Christ the

center of history. I mean that here, at one decisive point, the relationship between God and finite man was not interrupted. I would say that we have something in these two elements that has appeared for the first time in its full measure. Therefore Jesus was considered to be more than the prophets. The prophetic spirit never revealed itself this way. They saw; they expected; but they did not express in themselves what we find in the biblical picture of the Christ. That would be my answer to your question.

Professor: Then the difference between Christ and Meister Eckhart's conception of every man's becoming the Son of God is that Christ is significantly related to history in a way that other individuals would not be?

Dr. Tillich: That is at least the consequence of it.

Professor: This would make a significant contrast, then, with the Buddhist tradition. Generally speaking, true Buddhahood is possible for all Buddhists in the sense that Gautama himself realized it. In this connection would you comment on the difference between the Christian concept of "communion" and the idea of "union" found in oriental religions?

Dr. Tillich: One can say, in sum, that there is a mysticism of dissolution of the individual and a mysticism of love. It is interesting that when Bernard of Clairvaux speaks of the last stage in mystical development (not to be reached on earth), he describes it as like a drop of wine poured into a cup of wine. The drop is still there, but no longer independent; it is now identical with the whole. The fact that it is not *lost* is decisive, of course. But it is no longer self-centered. It has as its center, so to speak, the cup of wine as a whole, which is not its own. And I believe that we must face this fact. Our religious language is unable to resolve the difference between Buddhist — or, let us say, Hindu — and high Christian mysticism. But I know from two seminars which I led for a whole year on Christian mysticism that one can definitely say that Christian mysticism is always a mysticism of love.

Now love presupposes a differentiation between the subject and object of love. Even in imagining eternal life or eternal fulfillment, this differentiation remains. What that actually means cannot be further pursued. We can only state it. When we use a word like "communion" instead of "love," all the elements of separation which are presupposed in the concept of communion come into the picture. And in the mystical experience, where the classical phrase of Plotinus, "the meeting of the one with the one," is still valid, you can hardly escape it. But in the concept of the Eternal One, the Divine One, which is all-embracing — including the individual which reunites with the Divine One — the concept of unity is adequate. For this reason I would perhaps accept the two mysticisms: that of dissolution and that of love. And if someone asks, "What is the difference?" we cannot say more than this.

Professor: What of other basic differences between Christianity and, say, Buddhism?

Buddha and Christ as Historical Figures

Dr. Tillich: There is a very clear distinction between the Buddhist and Christian attitudes toward history. I have made many inquiries as to this in my discussions with Buddhists. And the way these discussions ran is very interesting. I recall especially one large meeting where thirty Japanese Buddhists — professors, priests, and masters — were gathered. I asked, "Do you have any analogy to our two-hundred-year-old research into the historical Jesus? And they answered, "No! Only in the last twenty years have a few scholars been interested in the exact circumstances of the life of Gautama." (And here I must say not "Buddha," but "Gautama," speaking of this man Gautama who was called the Buddha — very similar to the Christ situation.) Then I asked, "What historical knowledge do you have of Gautama, since you derive your religion from this man?" And they said, "We have the old traditions, which are not necessarily directly historical — the speeches and so on — which are somehow traced to this man. But even if he himself did not do or say these things, it does not matter." And then, of course, they spoke of the same experience you have just described, that there were "Buddhas" — "inspired ones" or "enlightened ones" — before the man Gautama, and innumerable others after him.

Now they used a term which I would like to understand better. They spoke of "the Buddha spirit." They used that English word. Perhaps you could help me. What Christian expression would come close to "the Buddha spirit"?

Professor: I would say, perhaps, "the Christ within you."

Dr. Tillich: Yes! Then the translation "spirit" would be accurate, because the Christ within us is always the Spirit of the Christ within us, according to New Testament thinking — or, in more philosophical language, the Logos within us. That perhaps would be even a little nearer.

From the point of view of a comparison, this obviously means that for the Buddhists the relationship to history is insignificant. But for Jewish-Christian thinking, history is the place where a relationship occurs, and God himself is history. In Indian religions, while of course everyone lives in history — that is, in time and space — history itself does not reveal anything, although to some people who live in time and space some things are revealed. That is the fundamental difference from the Christian concept of the revelatory character of the historical process itself, especially in the great kairos, the kairos of Jesus the Christ of the cross.

Professor: I agree, and would say that no matter how much research the Buddhists do into the life of Gautama, they will never come up with the same attitude toward history. But it seems to me that there remains one significant thing as yet unanswered. You have indicated that Christ, or Jesus as the Christ, is unique in the sense that he bears this unique revelatory relationship to history. But aside from that historical relationship and its tremendous influence upon human events, is there any difference — we go back to Meister Eckhart — is there any difference

between Jesus as God's only son, and Eckhart's you and me and everyone becoming God's only son? These others may not be significant "only sons" in an historical sense, but otherwise is there any significant difference in the way in which the kairos has entered into them?

Was Jesus Christ Unique?

Dr. Tillich: I agree with you that the historical answer, which you yourself brought up, is not the full answer. But we must of course also ask, "Why was this possible, this particular relationship to history?" However we approach the thing, Christian theology always replies, "In the picture of the New Testament we have temptation and tragedy, but we have no estrangement from God in any moment in the life of Jesus as it is pictured." I intentionally use the word "pictured" because these records are not historical records such as we might find about Caesar. But they reveal the power in him as it impressed itself on the disciples; beyond this we cannot go. This power produced that image, that story in which we see such struggles in Jesus — very human struggles. But we do not find any separation from God.

Later on, even in the New Testament where the story begins to be less specifically defined, there is the term "sinlessness," without sin. Now this word must be understood. If we consider the thirty years before his public life began, and then say that Jesus never became angry with his parents, for example, or create other biographical fantasies, we are mistaken. For this is not what the New Testament means. Sinlessness is a negative concept and can be understood only if we understand what "sin" means. Sin means the power that separates from God; it is a demonic power. And the conquest of this demonic power through communion with God does not involve a mental psychology by which Jesus becomes a supernatural baby. The absence of such nonsense is something that reveals the greatness of the New Testament. If we compare it with some of the writings that were excluded by the early church from the biblical collection, we find in them all kinds of fantasies; the thirty years before his public life are filled with superstitious miracles, making pigeons out of clay and then animating them, for example — all such nonsense. We really should be grateful to the early collectors of the New Testament for the fact that they excluded all that. And so the picture that we do have reveals what can be described best by the phrase "continuous communion with God" — no interruption of this.

Can Christ Be Distinguished from the Saints?

Professor: Before we lose this train of thought, may we take one final step? If we say that Jesus the Christ was sinless in the sense of not having been separated from God, do we not also find, in these others that Meister Eckhart speaks of, something that is the same? In other words, granted that there is sin, estrangement, and separation in the beginning, is the saint eventually in as close communion as the Christ? When we read the descriptions in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, or in the works of Teresa of Avila or John of the Cross, of contemplation and the final stage of union in which there is no estrangement, can we not say that in this final stage of sainthood the separation and estrangement and sin are gone, in the same sense as in all of Jesus' life?

Dr. Tillich: Yes, we can say that, because it is often said that the "Jesus likeness" is a *telos* of every man, an inner aim of every man, and it must, of course, be something that can be reached.

Professor: If it is reached, then is there any difference in the final form? Can we only distinguish Jesus as a unique person in the course of his entire life, but not as compared with the fullness of the nature of the saint? Is there any distinction?

Dr. Tillich: Now we cannot consider here the whole psychology of sainthood. It is very difficult. But if I interpret rightly the paintings by the medieval masters of the temptations of the saints, they never reached the state of superiority that we find in the image of Christ. But I don't know, really. The approximation cannot be denied. The question of whether the approximation leads to a full identity would have to be resolved by examining the inner souls of the saints in their latest and most perfect development. In any case, if there is a separation from the divine at any point in their lives, the results never entirely disappear. We call these the scars." And the interesting thing is that in the picture of Jesus in the New Testament we do not find "scars," although some have tried to prove the contrary. New Testament scholars often point to the words of Jesus to a man who calls him "good Master." Jesus rejects the term and says, "Nobody is good, except God alone." And I would accept that. Jesus is not good in himself, as the saints are not good in themselves. Therefore, I do not say he is the perfectly good man, as good as God himself; that would be against his own words. But I would say that the picture presents a process of union with God which shows no "scars" of moments of separation, nor prayer for forgiveness — all this is absent.

Now you probably know that I am a great skeptic with respect to historical research into the life of Jesus. I would also hold suspect research into the psychology of the saints. We can approach that aspect only very vaguely. But we can assert one thing with full evidence: we have the biblical text; we have the picture; it is there and cannot be denied. It stands before us; what is behind it is impossible for us to know. We can only say that the impression this man made on the disciples caused this image to appear. And this was, of course, a mutual thing. I always try to distinguish between the fact and its reception. This impression, the image, belongs both on the side of fact and on the side of reception. And no historical research can divide the image and say, "This aspect is reception of the fact, while this other aspect is actual fact," for they cannot be separated. They belong together.

Christ as a Symbol

Student: In this whole discussion there is something that has been bothering me, and it might be because of my religious background. But we have talked about Christ, and Christ as a symbol.

Dr. Tillich: Please be cautious! Repeat your sentence.

Student: Well, I am referring to a statement you once made to the effect that many of us are prone to say "just a symbol," whereas you would have us say "at least a symbol." If we look at Christ as a symbol, as some device which we can use as an expression of the ultimate, then, if I understand you, this alone is the only necessary requirement for Christian belief. And I am wondering if, by taking away such things as the historical personage of Christ, even such things as his taking a clay bird and animating it, and making it fly — by denying the possibility of these happenings and making the symbolism the only necessary element — are we not perhaps denying something to Christ that is properly his?

Dr. Tillich: Now I think that in our discussions of the last hour and a half we have been trying to overcome this misunderstanding. Therefore, you see, I said, "Be cautious." If you say the Christ is a "symbol," I would say instead that the term "Christ," the imagery connected with this term, is symbolic. And this imagery was applied to the man Jesus, who was as fully human as we are, according to the witness of the Bible and the church. That is what I said. But we cannot create a biographical psychology or psychological biography about those thirty years of Jesus' life, because we know nothing about them.

Student: Suppose, somehow or other, science could come and expose St. Paul, Christianity, and all these things as just a big hoax. My understanding of your theology would be that this would in no way invalidate Christianity as a religion.

Dr. Tillich: Now what do you mean by "a big hoax"?

Student: If they could prove that Christ, or Jesus, never existed.

Dr. Tillich: Oh, then he had some other name! That wouldn't matter. I want to say that if we were able to read the original police registers of Nazareth, and found that there was neither a couple called Mary and Joseph nor a man called Jesus, we should then go to some other city. The personal reality behind the gospel story is convincing. It shines through. And without this personal reality Christianity would not have existed for more than a year, or would not have come into existence at all, no matter what stories were told. But this was the great event that produced the transformation of reality. And if you yourself are transformed by it, you witness to the reality of what happened. That is the proof.

Which Religious Symbols Are Now Dead?

Student: Which Christian symbols are alive today and which have died?

Dr. Tillich: In Protestantism many Catholic symbols have died. The most powerful, most effective symbol in the Roman church, namely, the "Mary cult" or "Virgin cult," no longer exists in Protestantism. It has died out completely, I believe, and all attempts to save or restate it

are probably hopeless.

Now in Protestantism itself, the doctrine of atonement in terms of the substitutional suffering, which played a tremendous role in Pietism, is more or less dead. The idea of substitution for our sins in this manner is so strange to us, because of our fully developed individualism, that we hardly can understand it. And in the last chapter of the second volume of my *Systematic Theology*, I have offered criteria which I believe must be used if another atonement doctrine is to be developed. I did not develop a new doctrine myself because we are in a transition period concerning a symbol which has almost died and probably cannot be restored in the original sense.

Now what *does* work, or can be restored, is a very hard question. We also must ask *where* does it work? In many areas fundamentalism, for instance, using symbols from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, still works — even the "inspiration doctrine" of the Bible. In other areas it does not work.

For Catholics, the infallibility of the Pope has been slightly undercut by Pope John XXIII himself. I know directly that he did not like this doctrine. He very cautiously devaluated — or downgraded, as the Russians say — the Council of 1870, where it was declared.

I attended a meeting yesterday to give a speech on the church and the unity of the church. There I made a rather controversial statement about the Greek Orthodox church, which I like very much, but which is in many respects obsolete. The question, therefore, was: How can any church union with it be possible? We cannot go back and pretend that the whole history of Western Christianity — both the Roman church and Protestantism — has never happened. Now there were a few Orthodox church people there, and later they conceded that many things would have to be changed in order to overcome the obsoleteness. The whole liturgy, the whole dogmatic fixation of the first five hundred years of church history, is something that no longer works.

Student: When a symbol dies which expressed a certain need or a certain experience of ultimate concern, and is not replaced by another symbol, is the vitality of the religion that has lost the symbol weakened?

Dr. Tillich: Oh, that is an excellent question! When the Protestants gave up many of the Catholic symbols at the Reformation, an empty space was left in Protestantism. There was an absence of the female element, for example, which is so important for Catholic piety. In some aspects of Jesus there is a female element. In the doctrine of the Spirit there is, because of its half-mystical character, something female. But a direct female image is lacking. So there is an empty space in Protestantism. It is a very masculine religion. Some elements implied in the concept of grace are also lacking. Grace is moralized in America and intellectualized in Europe. As for the element of the *soul*, even that word is forbidden today in America, at least in most

universities. So we have "psychology without a soul." This situation can be traced to a lack of the female element.

But now let us be cautious. When we recognize the loss of a symbol we cannot say, "Let's try to replace it." Symbols cannot be invented; they cannot be produced intentionally. But perhaps the mystical element may be the way in which a different sort of Protestantism, a nonmoralistic and nonintellectualistic Protestantism, may return to some of the positive elements in Catholicism.

Student: Would you say that one of the chief reasons why the female image has not been able to enter into the theology of Protestantism is because of the continuing protest against the Roman Catholic use of the image?

Dr. Tillich: Yes. The abuse of the figure of Mary in Catholicism has been tremendous. Of course, the Catholics would say Mary is not in the Trinity, but when they call her "co-saviour," as they often do, she is actually elevated into a divine power. She has even sometimes replaced God and Christ. I remember an experience in Mexico, where it seemed that we found not Christianity but "Maryanity," because for the ordinary people only Mary was an object of piety. In Catholic dogma Mary is merely venerated, not "adored," since God alone can be adored. But in practice it is not difficult to see where this limit is blurred.

The Kairos and the Individual

Student: Could we return now to the idea of the kairos? It is said that this power has been manifested in our society with the coming of Christ. And in the Hindu religion this idea applies to Rama and Krishna. Can this also be applied on the individual level? We presume that it can, and if so, how is this realized by the individual himself?

Dr. Tillich: Do you mean, are there outstanding moments in the life of an individual which could be called kairos?

Student: Yes.

Dr. Tillich: Oh, of course. And very often when I try to interpret the meaning of the kairos I refer to biographical experiences in which something new, unexpected, transforming, breaks into our life. We can certainly speak of these moments as "kairotic." Jesus also uses it somehow in an auto biographical way when he says, "My kairos has not yet come." Then, of course, the baptism story is a kairos, very definitely And there are a few other such moments in the story, which I have always referred to as the center of the whole gospel: The encounter of Peter and Jesus concerning the Messiah and Satan. This was a kairos in Jesus' life. In Mark everything is written in such a way that it leads finally to this point. And I think most people have the feeling that they have had experiences like this in their own lives.

Student: Is this realized at the time, or after the fact?

Dr. Tillich: Both. It can be that we feel there is some thing vital in some moment, and then the feeling soon disappears and we realize it was not a real kairos. At other times it might happen that we do not have much feeling, but a year or so later we realize that this was a turning point in our lives. So both ways are possible.

Student: May we use personal examples? Not examples in the life of Christ, but in our own lives or in your life in which a kairos occurred? What would you think of that?

Dr. Tillich: Oh, yes, that could be done. But I don't know what your question is.

Student: I would like a personal example from you.

Dr. Tillich: Oh, better not! Take Francis of Assisi. Take Paul's conversion on his way to Damascus. We have examples in the whole history of piety in all periods and in all countries. I believe that Professor Brown could give dozens of examples, out of the Hindu or Buddhist religions, of people who designate one particular moment or several particular moments as the times when the eternal took hold of them. But I would not give autobiographical examples.

Student: Well, perhaps I'd better explain the reason for my question. If you use as an example Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus, there is this element of the miraculous — the voice from Heaven and so on — which is unconvincing.

Dr. Tillich: Oh, this is just the way in which such stories were told.

Student: All right! Then in my own experience, when something like this happens, I do not consider it as the entrance of anything infinite or eternal. It is merely understanding of what I already know, or a re-understanding of the finite, or a deepening in my experience of the finite.

Dr. Tillich: Now, in the word "deepening" itself something ultimate is implied. If this is not the case, if we merely understand mathematics better, for instance, it simply means that for a long time we listen but nothing happens; then suddenly it clicks. This I would not call kairos, but rather a coming together of our disposition for understanding and the reality that is given to us. But the term kairos can be used in this connection only if the event is fundamental for the meaning of our existence. And whether we call it the eternal or the divine or whatever, if something happens to us which has to do with the ultimate meaning of our life, I would call it an individual kairos.

Student: Then the kairos can be equivalent to the conversion experience?

Dr. Tillich: In some cases, yes. But usually it is not conversion. It is a "deepening," as the student said, or a transformation in some respect.

Student: The idea that you just talked about, this personal kairos, has implications for a universal religion. These experiences are alike, despite differing religious or cultural backgrounds. Doesn't this imply that there is essentially only one religion? Now I know this is what you say is *not* so in your book,[1] but doesn't all this point to a universal, personal revelatory experience?

Dr. Tillich: Now the expression "one religion" is not a very clear term. There are many religions. And since they all are called religions there must of course be points of identity, for otherwise we could not use the word. (I tried, in our earlier sessions, to develop this point of identity in terms of "ultimate concern.") And the consequence is that the structures of all religions reveal many analogies. Read any work on comparative religion, and you will find that the concrete religions have astonishing parallels. We discovered in the last hour with Professor Brown some very interesting analogies in the Oriental traditions. Sacrifice, concepts of holiness, concepts of the divine and the demonic, miracles (whatever this word may mean in special contexts), all appear in all religions. It is very interesting. And in discussing the encounter of religions this fact is a necessary presupposition, for otherwise dialogues would not be possible.

But now the question is: Which of these elements can really be used for a reunion of mankind in the religious sense? My discussions in Japan were very important in this respect because they showed me for the first time the clear possibility of having dialogues of this character. I discovered the possibility of understanding, on the one hand the structural analogies, and on the other the fundamental differences. So both sides must be examined. And if one speaks in a vague and glib way of one religion, or of bringing them all together, then I, for one, become critical. I think we should not pretend an identity where there is a very fundamental difference in the whole experience and attitude toward history, as between the Western and Eastern religions.

Student: What is the relationship between the kairos on a personal level and "kairotic" events on the historical level?

Dr. Tillich: I would say there is no necessary connection between personal kairos and kairos-consciousness with respect to history. When I think of our German reform group after the World War I, I recall that the movement was important for us because the war, defeat, revolution, and the feeling of the call to rebuild society had been so compelling. In my own particular case I would not call this a personal kairos in autobiographical terms. I would consider it important in my development; on the other hand there was one moment in the war, in the middle of a terrible battle, which I would always call a kairos in my own life.

Jesus — the Image and the Reality

Student: The subject of the uniqueness of Christ is terrifically important for those of Christian background. There seems to be a confusion between the historic and the symbolic here. I thought we had pinned down the uniqueness of Chirst in your thinking to his uniqueness as *the* center of history, but then you switched a little later and said that the important thing was the picture of Christ. You indicated that the Christ-picture was perfect but not necessarily the man. The man Jesus was not necessarily any more perfect than any saint can become, or than we can become. But the picture is. Do you see the difficulty?

Dr. Tillich: Oh, of course, you are not the first to point to it. Now the discussion here has explored two sides of a problem. The one concerned the kairos, which is an historical concept of the religious interpretation of history. And we spoke about the Christ as the center of history — whatever this may mean. But it is this relationship to history that can be contrasted with Buddhism, for instance, which ignores history.

Then the second question or side concerned another kind of uniqueness, namely, the rejection of anything finite which claims to be by itself infinite. And this was connected with the cross.

As to the "picture," this word is dubious. Sometimes I have been advised to call it image instead of picture. I don’t know which is better. I refer now to everything we read about Jesus in the Gospels and the epistles of the New Testament. They all contribute to an image. This image, of course, changes in the biblical literature itself, and changes again and again in every century of Christianity. The reality behind it is in no historical case identical with the image. In the New Testament, all the images share one quality in which they are identical: they called Jesus the Christ. In this, all letters and all gospel stories are identical. And from these are derived many special events, as I would call them, or in terms of literary criticism, "anecdotes." They are not a biography; they are anecdotes that demonstrate something. Something is shown either about Jesus as the Christ or about things which the early groups of followers had to know — how to pray, for instance. The event includes both the fact and the reception. The fact has the power of impressing itself on the disciples in such a way that historical images occur. And these images are very different.

If we compare the Mark image and the John image — the images in the first and the fourth Gospels — they are, in many respects and in the whole vision, contradictory. The man who spoke and worked and acted in Mark is not the same as the one who spoke and worked and acted in John. John is a reinterpretation of the life of Jesus in the light of later problems. It is not even so much a biography as the first Gospels. They, at least, use anecdotes with historical backgrounds. John is a theological book, and therefore is best for theology because it answers problems. I very often use it, not because I think that here I have the authentic words of Jesus — I don’t believe there is any authentic word of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel — but because I know that here the meaning of the Christ, the meaning of the fundamental statement "This is the

Christ," is brought out in the light of later problems. And these problems are also *our* problems. Therefore I often feel, like Luther, that this is really the chief Gospel, not because it gives us an historical picture, but because it depicts in words the power in this event.

Take Lincoln. There we have an analogy. He has become a myth, or symbol at least, for the American people, a great symbol. And a living person stands behind it. But the decisive thing is how he impressed himself on the American people so that he could become a symbol.

This is the way history develops, and therefore image and reality are not contradictory terms. Image is the way in which, in history, reality expresses itself and is handed down from one generation to the other.

Professor: I believe you got a very thorough answer to your question, but I wonder if you framed the question as you really meant to?

Student: Well, it still puzzles me very deeply, to say the least.

Dr. Tillich: Now what is "it"?

Student: Well, the subject of the historical — the importance, or lack of importance, of the historical person of Jesus.

Dr. Tillich: Yes. That is the question to which I tried to give an answer.

Student: Well, I'm still puzzled because I would like to know what the relation is between Jesus and ourselves and other men. Is Jesus unique only because history or historical factors converge in a certain way — in a uniquely significant way — at the time of his life?

Dr. Tillich: No, no, no! I have now given already at least three answers to this. My chief answer was the lack of any "scar" which would show an estrangement from God. That is one thing.

Another was the total self-sacrifice of "him who is the Christ"; for the Messiah can be the Messiah only if he sacrifices his finitude. That was the second answer.

Then the third answer was that he shows the presence, in his suffering and on the cross, of an utter humility. He humiliates himself as a slave and experiences the death of a slave. Now this demonstrates that God is not strange to the lowest reality.

So I could go on. It does not make sense to concentrate on any one aspect here. We must see all the different relations.

I have been asked about all this in relation to Buddha. Doesn't Buddha also do this, and isn't he also a symbol for the nonvalidity of the finite? Yes, certainly! In this there is a unity, but in other respects there is not. The New Testament very clearly reveals the image of an actual person who stands within a history of revelation going through the whole of the Old Testament. And in this history, of course, he is unique and he fulfills something.

NOTES:

1. *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions,* p. 96: "A mixture of religions destroys in each of them the concreteness which gives it its dynamic power."

16

return to religion-online

Ultimate Concern - Tillich in Dialogue by D. Mackenzie Brown

Donald Mackenzie Brown is Chairman of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of California in Santa Barbara. This book was published in 1965 by Harper & Row, Publishers. This book was prepared for Religion Online by Harry W. and Grace C. Adams.

Seventh Dialogue

Professor: Our first question relates to the miracles of Christ.

What Is a Miracle?

Student: My question concerns your answer to the question about Paul's personal kairos and the vision he had. You said that this was just a figurative explanation of the author of the epistle in which this event was described. I would like to know why you are prompted here, and in many other instances, to deny what we would call a miraculous element and say that it is just a figurative way of explaining things? Why couldn't there be some supernatural power at work here that is actually suspending the laws of nature?

Dr. Tillich: Now you touch on a problem which underlies everything, the problem of natural and supernatural. It has innumerable implications and is very difficult to simplify. In this special case, I do not deny the visionary experience and the whole scene, but if the inner voice Paul heard is called a "voice from Heaven," what does it mean? Did the earth stand in a certain relationship to the sun, in a particular position at that moment? Was the voice carried on a blinding ray? All these questions, if taken literally, are nonsense and have little to do with the meaning of the reality of that visionary experience. For the visionary experience was a certain reality. And I even speak of "breaking in," which has a supernatural sound but is not supernaturalism. You approach something here that is fundamental to all my thinking — the antisupernaturalistic attitude. If you would like to prepare yourself, I recommend the one section about reason and revelation in the first volume of my *Systematic Theology,* where I deal extensively with miracle, inspiration, ecstasy, and all these concepts, and try to interpret them in a nonsupernaturalistic — and that would mean also a nonsuperstitious — way.

Student: Somehow you seem to refuse to take Christ's miracles literally. I detect an inclination on your part to interpret all the miracles simply as allegorical. And I was wondering if this

could in any way be a denial of the miraculous in the person of Christ?

Dr. Tillich: Did you ever read the section on miracles in my *Systematic Theology*?

Student: No, sir, I haven't.

Dr. Tillich: Well, that's a pity, because you see there is so much to be said about this problem. First of all, when you ask that question, may I ask you what you mean by miracles?

Student: Well, in catechism in Sunday school, we learned that miracles imply a "suspension of the laws of nature." I suppose that is as good a definition as any.

Dr. Tillich: Where did you learn this? It is very interesting. Because this is precisely the idea which I fiercely combat in all my work, whenever I speak of these things. Was that really taught in your catechism, or by the Sunday-school teacher, who could not do better because she had learned it from another Sunday-school teacher who also could not do better?

Student: It is hard for me to recall where I originally got it. But I got it somewhere.

Dr. Tillich: Now if you define a miracle like this, then I would simply say that this is a demonic distortion of the meaning of miracle in the New Testament. And it is distorted because it means that God has to destroy his creation in order to produce his salvation. And I call this demonic, because God is then split in himself and is unable to express himself through his creative power. In truth, of course, there are many things that are miraculous, literally "things to be astonished about," from *mirari* in Latin, to be astonished. And if you refrain from defining miracles in this distorted, actually demonic, way, we can begin to talk intelligently about them.

Of course, many problems do arise. There is first of all the problem of what really *does* happen objectively, and then the problem of what happens in the human being who experiences such astonishment. The first thing I want to state here is that only in a correlative relationship between the subjective and the objective sides of the experience can we speak of a miracle. This is the reason why Jesus declined when the Pharisees and the scribes asked him to perform a "show" miracle — the kind of magic trick we might watch at country fairs. They asked him to do this, and he refused. This expresses the fact that miracles, in the sense in which he was involved in them, are events which have a particular significance *to* the person who experiences them. That is the one fundamental statement. Miracles are subjective-objective, subject-object-oriented, always in correlation, and never comprehensible in any other way. Not merely subjective, they are not merely objective, either.

This is also true of all human relations. Love of high quality is not only a momentary fascination but a real relationship. The way in which two lovers encounter each other and see

each other cannot be reduced to an objective psychology concerning one person or the other alone. Only *in* encounter does the reality of how they see each other appear, for both persons. Therefore an outside observer cannot truly observe, because the very situation of being an object of an objective observer changes a person. Only in the encounter is the vision of the other one possible. Now this is an example of the necessity of existential participation, and it must be applied also to miracles. I hope this point is now comparatively clear.

But there is another point, and it is clearly described in the New Testament, where miracles are called "signs." What does that mean? It means that not every or any astonishment over something that happens is a miracle. For example, when I drove down here a few days ago, there was suddenly a thunderstorm. My driver said, "This is amazing. Here this never happens, and now of course when you come, it thunders!" This was astonishment on his part, but it was not a miracle in the New Testament sense because one thing was lacking: it was not a sign that pointed beyond finite reality. So something merely rare within the context of reality does not necessarily have, at the same time, the character of "pointing beyond."

The sign character of a miracle I call in my books a "sign event," and this combination of the words event and sign is very important. "Event" in religious language should always be understood as a combination of something objective and something subjective, of fact and reception of fact. These two elements belong to every religious event. Now if this is clear, then of course it is a *rare* situation in which miracles, in this sense, appear. They appear only if the revelatory situation is given.

The Catholic church requires very lengthy procedures in judging the candidacy of any particular personality for sainthood. A "devil’s advocate" tries his best to prove the unworthiness of the candidate. One of the main issues is the proving of miracles. Now this I have always understood very well. I have always defended the Catholic church on this issue, although the average Protestant feels much estranged by the idea. But he is estranged because he does not know what "saint" means. He thinks a saint is somebody who doesn’t smoke, dance, or drink. That is one of the lowest levels of moralism and has nothing to do with the real concept of a saint. The real meaning of sainthood is radiation, transparency to the holy — or translucency to the holy, if you prefer that word. "Radiation" is perhaps the best, since a saint radiates the presence of the divine in a special way. And in this situation miracles can happen, which means that an astonishing event can point beyond itself.

Therefore miracles happened in the presence of Jesus, and they did not happen in the presence of the apostles except when they were themselves full of the divine Spirit. This formulation should open up our understanding of miracles as a whole, not only those in the New Testament stories, but also the many miraculous events in the whole history of the church, and the very similar miracle stories in other religions. If there is a situation which points beyond itself, it is possible for astonishing events to be experienced and religiously justified.

Now the next point I want to make is that actual miracle stories are always in danger of being brought down to a kind of rationalistic supranaturalism. By this I mean that they are thought of as supranatural in the sense of the breaking in of a causal power from another realm. But miracles operate in terms of ordinary causality. To think of them as involving an objective breaking of the structure of reality, or suspending the laws of nature, is superstition. If the stories are told in this way, we have of course to inquire historically as to the real basis for them: What *is* the astonishing thing that actually happened? Usually we cannot pursue such inquiries very far. We would also have to ask: Under what conditions did this rationalization occur? How was the miraculous character of the miracle distorted and made to depend, not on its power of pointing to the presence of the divine, but on a recounting in such a way that the structure of reality or natural law is broken?

Natural law is, in the view of modern philosophy, not what it was to Kant. It is a problematic term today. But let us agree that reality has a structure. The superstitious development of miracle traditions, which is very rationalistic — not irrational, but rationalistic — desires to emphasize the contradiction of the structure of reality. I have already spoken about the pseudo Gospels or rejected Gospels as we may call them, in which stories about Jesus were told that made him as a boy, for example, construct pigeons out of clay and then give them the power to fly in the air. Now this is what I call rationalism which becomes superstition. The combination of two things, rationalism and superstition, that seem to contradict each other makes most of the miracle stories, not only in the New Testament but everywhere, so difficult for us to understand. This is why I believe that a thorough purge of our usual understanding of these things is necessary. I would call these stories a fantastic combination of antirational rationalisms.

Professor: Although you have indicated that it is not a valid element in defining a miracle, would you deny the possibility of another realm of causality breaking through into the realm of causality that we know, and thus causing events that are not understood in terms of the system of causality which we do understand?

Dr. Tillich: If these superstitions are claimed to be events within the total structure of causality, then I would say they cannot occur. But let me give an example: the coming down of the storm, the biblical story of the storm on the Sea of Galilee. [Mark 4:37-41] If you take this story, and insist that a "transcendent causality" entered at that point, I would ask, "What does that mean?" because I don’t understand the combination of those two words. Causality is a category which we have abstracted, from the dawn of philosophy, from the interrelation of events. There are many types of causality — physical, psychological, historical. There is the quantitive calculable causality, which is a kind of exchange. There is the creative causality in history, where something new is produced on the basis of the old. All these are different forms of causality.

But all are understandable in the totality of being. If they are not understandable in this context, then the result of them could not be something which belongs completely to the meteorological conditions that occurred at the time of a storm in Palestine in the year 29, let us say. If they

enter into this, then they are part of the total. Otherwise, the total would no longer exist. One atom in the whole universe which did not belong to the whole of the universe would destroy the structure of the universe. You can discover this easily if you think through, for one moment, the idea of a structured whole. If one element were completely extraneous, and nevertheless "in" it, the whole would be destroyed. You are a mathematician? It is necessary for us, I believe, to think as mathematicians at this point.

So if there are, in the whole of the universe, causalities — relationships of realities — then there are two possibilities. First we have the Greek world view, in which miracles were very easy. They occurred continually, because the gods were members of the cosmos, beings with power. And with their power they were interrelated with the whole of reality. When they appeared, they could direct a hero's arrow and cause it to reach its aim or not. Then they were also empirical causalities, beings like ourselves, but with slightly more power. This comes out clearly in the tragedies, which speak against the gods. Prometheus stands already as a representative of man in opposition to these gods.

The second possibility is that of the absolutely transcendent, and then the situation is quite different. Then the whole can produce, within its own structure, things which are astonishing. But this "divine" power is not a particular causality which interferes with the law of the whole. That would be my answer.

Professor: It is not necessary to assume that this other realm of causality is outside of the universe, but merely that it is beyond human understanding at a particular historical period.

Dr. Tillich: Oh, if it is a part of the universe, and cannot be understood by us today, it is very easy to accept. There are innumerable things which we do not understand, and the deeper physics goes into nature the more *it* understands the limits of its understanding. So if you take it as a finite reality, I am open to any wonderful thing.

Professor: Is it possible to suppose that Jesus and the saints had access to a larger realm of causality than other human beings in the same way that an atomic scientist has a greater access than we do?

Dr. Tillich: Now here I would say, unfortunately or fortunately, that Jesus was not an atomic scientist. He was a full human being, and if at that time he had had the knowledge of an atomic scientist or a modern physician, I would take the position that his humanity would have been denied. In matters of empirical knowledge he was as limited as anyone in his time. He had, as people often can have, a deeper existential insight into the psychology of human beings; this comes out very clearly, but it is not miraculous. It belongs to the person-to-person relationship. And I would agree with you on this, that his insight into the human psychology of other people was much more than ordinarily profound. But it was not mythologically divine. Now if we introduce divine knowledge into the empirical realm of his knowledge, the Council of

Chalcedon is wrong. And because of his full humanity, strongly emphasized by the Christian church, he could not have had supernatural knowledge about empirical realities.

Professor: In this respect, then, we would have to note a contrast between the Western Christian tradition and some Asiatic traditions, where it is assumed that "transparency" brings with it certain forms of knowledge and power which you have just denied in the case of Jesus.

Dr. Tillich: How for instance? It would be good if you could give us an example where this is a matter of natural events. I do not mean psychological understanding. I know there are phenomena where a mother has a feeling of what concerns her child, who may live a thousand miles away. There is a kind of communication. These are facts which have often occurred, and we do not know enough about them. But people who have experienced this — many have told me about these experiences — never call them, in themselves, miracles.

Professor: An example would be the stories of the levitation of holy men, floating from place to place. You have these even in Catholic tradition, like the stories of St. Teresa of Avila. At Mass she was said sometimes to rise to the ceiling. These were not necessarily considered as holy things but as powers or capacities that came to them simply because of their transparency. From the religious point of view, Asian tradition has considered them to be dangerous powers, even undesirable, but nevertheless not to be denied.

Dr. Tillich: I would insist first on some historical research. How well authenticated are the documents? And then I would ask, is it possible that the inner vitality of a body does something which we do when we spring, and which sometimes keeps the body quite a long time in the air? (I could do this as a boy, very well.) This ability might be extended, if the vitality or the tension of the muscles becomes stronger. But an actual *negation* of gravitation would not be for me a "miracle." If such a phenomenon occurred, it would be to me demonic, because it would deny the holy law by which all things in the universe strive toward each other. And I consider gravitation, in this sense, to be the law of love in the universe, a tending of each of us toward the other. The denial of this I would insist is a demonic form, unless explained by an intensification of muscular tension — something we know can happen in the body, which makes "levitation" possible. I truly suspect any historical documents that try to describe this phenomenon in any other way. After all, St. Teresa was in ecstasy, and perhaps the others too!

In any case, this feeling of elevation in itself is a most interesting psychological phenomenon. We call going to God an "elevation" to the divine. Why do we use this symbol. There is some reason for it, and I would not give up the attempt to explain it. If you proclaim that here is a particular divine power coming from outside, or that the divine power *within* her intensified an otherwise normal happening, would not deny the possibility. But the petty idea that God is *a being* who sometimes works in terms of finite causality producing finite effects within the structural whole, is contrary to everything I believe of God. It is one of the reasons I combat so strongly the term "God is a being"; because he *is* a being, he is no better than Zeus or Hermes,

coming down from Olympus (incidentally a comparatively low mountain). If he merely exists, of course he can participate in normal causalities.

Professor: Regardless of how you interpret these phenomena, Eastern tradition tends to accept them. But you would say the Western Christian would have to reject them?

Dr. Tillich: No! If the East can accept, for example the performances of some yogis who do almost impossible things, lying on nails and things like that without hurting themselves, I would say that we cannot deny them, for we are spectators of it. But then I would ask, how are they possible? I would demand that a medical committee find out how psychological states which, of course, can be produced by the inner religious situation, can have such an effect that the skin is not injured. If what we see proves a reality, they will find out some day why it is possible, and then their case will be understandable. And the religious element will remain in it. But this very much differs from a sudden divine causality, which could not occur anyway in the Eastern tradition, because they would not consider God just a being who has causal effects. They would say instead that it was the God *in* them. That I would accept.

Professor: Before we leave this subject, may we ask our visiting Catholic Father for his comment?

Catholic Father: Well, I must say I have never been very much attracted to the study of those miraculous happenings. I would have to study the exact facts.

Dr. Tillich: So you are skeptical about the facts of St. Teresa's levitations?

Catholic Father: Oh yes!

Dr. Tillich: Now that is good!

Catholic Father: What I commend more is your fighting against the expression "God is a being." You see, that is very interesting, because I stand with Meister Eckhart, who says exactly the same. We can't say of God, "He exists." And in the same way, we cannot say that he does not exist.

Dr. Tillich: Yes, exactly! He is beyond existence or nonexistence.

Student: A long time ago I read a book called *The Bible as History* which said there is no such thing as a miracle.[1] It said that anything explained in the Old and New Testaments as a miracle is merely an action of natural law. The Red Sea, or the Nile River, has a very dark red clay in it, and it rolls down the river. Perhaps the biblical writers thought this looked like blood. And the winds or the tides on the Red Sea sometimes make it very shallow, which could give the effect

of the opening of the Red Sea and then its closing again after the escape of the Jews. I was wondering what you might say about this?

Dr. Tillich: Oh, such explanations are sometimes more fantastic than the stories themselves. Sometimes they are justified. I do not know. Nobody knows the basic historical events of the Exodus. The thing you refer to sometimes happens in the North Sea after a storm. Some places become very shallow at low tide, and then suddenly the sea comes back. These things can happen, and they may seem like a miracle *in the context.* The miracle was the feeling of Israel, under the leadership of Moses, that this was not a causal event (which it is of course for meteorologists or oceanographers), but a proof of the presence of God with Israel. It was something astonishing, not to be expected at all. They had been captives of the Pharaoh's power and were then rescued from it.

Consider another example where it is even more obvious: the salvation of Jerusalem in the time of Isaiah from the Assyrian siege, which was a hopeless situation. Then, it is said, the angel of God slew the army of the enemy. They became sick and had to give up the siege. What actually happened seems clear. An epidemic attack of cholera, or something like it, killed many of the soldiers and officers, and so the king of Assyria decided that with his limited power he could not take Jerusalem. But for Isaiah this was a most astonishing situation, because the cause seemed lost against the superiority of the Assyrians. For him this was a revelatory act, and it was.

Sometimes, in my *Systematic Theology*, I use the term "constellation" to indicate a group of phenomena in a special situation or condition which has "sign character" for somebody — for instance, a prophet. That is what a real miracle is.

It is not that an angel was sent to Jerusalem who had the devilish effect of making these soldiers, innocent in themselves, sick. That was not the situation, I believe; that is a symbolization, a poetic symbolization.

I think that if the Germans had realized how Hitler came to nought by events which were quite unexpected — as at Stalingrad, which was the beginning of the end — they would have said to themselves, "This is the same thing that happened to the king of Assyria." They would have understood that this tremendous ascendancy and subsequent descent of Hitler was just the song of Isaiah in the eleventh chapter. This was a fundamental feeling in the best German people. Stalingrad became a sign event for many, showing that putting oneself on the throne of God, as Hitler did, is always followed by catastrophe. And we could name many other examples.

Student: Your first premise was that we shouldn't require God to interfere and break natural law, because by doing so we demonize God. Then you went on to say later that something outside the world couldn't interfere by breaking the law, because if we took one atom out it would destroy the whole structure of things. This seems to me to be putting a limitation on God.

We are saying that God has to follow a scientific, logical manner when he operates in the world, that he couldn't hold the world together if he did pull out one atom.

Dr. Tillich: No. If you said that God is a causality in the whole of the world, himself, you would be right. But if you say he is the "ground of being," the "creative divinity," then he creates all the time. And he creates all the time in the direction in which he wants to create, but according to the Logos. And the Logos means reason, word, structure. Everything is made through the Logos in the Fourth Gospel. If we take this childishly, then we add that there was an aid, another being, through whom God created the world. The Bible is not as foolish as this. The Bible means that the universal structure of being, which is the principle of divine self-manifestation, participates in creation. And this universal structure, at the same time, has appeared as a human being in the Christ. If you state it this way, you say something which is in line with biblical reality.

But your statement referred to a god who is "limited" if he cannot work any nonsense in the world when he wants to. This idea of an almighty tyrant, sitting on his throne, means that he could suddenly create a stone so heavy that he could not carry it himself. Now you see the absurdity to which you come if you persist in this imagery.

Student: You say that a miracle could not be an intervention of God into his creation, and with this I will agree But I prefer to think of it as an application of natural laws of which we do not have knowledge. You mentioned the yogis in Hinduism, but the East thinks of different levels of reality. Man is physical, mental, and spiritual; and there is a continuum of relationship all the way through. Each of these levels has its laws, or natural laws. Now couldn't a miracle be an application of a law on a higher level than we may be aware of?

Dr. Tillich: Well, yes, you might consider for instance the biological as a higher level. At the biological level we do not completely understand biological reality in terms of chemical laws. I would say that there are many things in biology of which we know very little. I participated in a conference in Chicago recently with some physicists and theologians. It was astonishing to hear the geneticists — the subject was atomic radiation, the radiation problem — admit how little we know about the laws or events of mutation. They simply said, "We do not know." Innumerable mysteries remain. But I refuse to admit that an event like the unusual storm which I experienced two days ago in Santa Barbara was supernatural. We do not need to move a whole realm of hidden meteorological forces in order to explain this. There certainly are many meteorological phenomena of which, as yet, we know nothing. But if we consider the actions of Jesus during the storm in the Bible as affecting the whole meteorological constellation of the world, which this really would imply, then we would contribute to what I think is a demonic destruction of the structure of reality.

Now take many psychological occurrences: nobody really knows the truth about the phenomena described, for instance, at Duke University by —.

Professor: Extrasensory perception?

Dr. Tillich: Yes — what is the name of the man?

Student: Dr. Rhine?

Dr. Tillich: Yes, thank you. Now, for instance, I could easily understand a similar experience in the case of Jesus when he says to the soldier from Capernaum, "Go home: thy servant has been healed." [Matt. 8:5-13] From friends and others I have heard of similar experiences. And here we have no real explanation in our usual sense. I agree with you. But what you call "level" I prefer to call "dimension," and I would say that the structures within this dimension are largely unknown to us. There may be insights in the East that go far beyond those of the West because our interest, in modern times, is exclusively the quantitive, calculable side of reality. But do we say that everything can be explained by such insights? That would be more rationalization.

Professor: Dr. Tillich, may we ask one final question on this? Does the translucence of Jesus give him greater access to these often hidden realms than the ordinary person would have?

Dr. Tillich: Yes, I believe in the same way in which it would give such access to St. Teresa or other saints — perhaps in a higher degree. But we cannot answer this in terms of empirical knowledge.

Professor: But intuitive knowledge?

Dr. Tillich: Intuitive knowledge in psychological realms, I would believe, yes. Because that is where intuition plays a much higher role than in the physical dimension. And since Jesus was certainly what the New Testament says, "full of the divine spirit and driven by the divine spirit, and possessed of the spirit without limit," he was superior in all those realms in which existential participation is possible, as many human beings are superior. But in realms where the calculative method and the method of verification have to be applied, we should not say that the religiously great man has more knowledge. Every young student of physics knows more about physics than Jesus knew, or any of the saints of the Orient.

Professor: But you would still expect to find more examples of these unusual phenomena to be associated with the lives of men like the saints, or with Jesus?

Dr. Tillich: Yes, but only if we clearly distinguish these levels of knowledge in terms of participation, which can happen between men and men, and sometimes between men and animals to a certain degree, where "empathetic participation" can be strengthened by a strong spirituality. Then I would accept this. But if it is objectified, as empirical knowledge, I would

adhere to my former statement that any student of physics at the University of California in Santa Barbara first semester, knows more about physics than the man Jesus and all the saints, who simply did not have this objective knowledge.

Student: Well, then you are saying that Jesus, as far as you are concerned, wasn't so much a worker of miracles as a good psychologist?

Dr. Tillich: Now "psychologist" can also mean two things in this context. You see, language is so important in this discussion. "Good psychologists" can be "test psychologists" as at Berkeley, a very highly developed institution in this field. And good psychologists can be those who meet a girl and feel there is something in her which makes her adequate for friendship, and perhaps even marriage. But this latter application of psychology is not a matter which can really be scientifically objectified by the psychology department of a university; it is "empathetic participation." And in this sense Jesus was a good psychologist; but we don't call what he had "good psychology" — we call it empathy for other human beings.

Student: One of your German colleagues, Bonhoeffer, it seem to me, explains miracles in the same way: that natural laws haven't been fully understood yet. Aren't we, then, sort of edging God out of the world progressively as our knowledge increases? We know more and God knows less.

Dr. Tillich: Yes, this is true of a god who is a particular force and knows much, like the Greek god Hermes, for example, who knew more about the directions by which to go somewhere than the people he had to guide. Certainly in this sense God was eliminated, I think, by the Greek philosophers when they called "being-itself" divine. But actually this elimination never fully occurred, even in Christianity. Therefore we have always had to have a theology that combats the idea of a god who simply knows more than man. Instead, theology insists on a God who knows everything. And that is something entirely different, qualitatively different, because this is not a knowledge in terms of subject-object. It is the knowledge of being the "creative ground" of everything. And therefore everything participates in him, and he in it. Otherwise we commit another absurdity: God knows what would have happened, if what did happen had not happened! Now this kind of absurdity simply has to be given up, as well as the nonsense of putting God in the situation of a heavenly tyrant who has a better knowledge about physics than we have. God is *in* every moving atom, in it as its creative ground. He is not identical with it; that would be pantheism. But he is its creative ground. And he is *in* it, not substantially only but also spiritually, and therefore knowingly. That is what divine knowledge means. And for the sake of this real God, the god who knows more or less must be eliminated. In this sense you are right.

What Is Providence?

Student: I am not clear in my own mind as to the relationship of God or the divine to the

concept of a "sign event" that we were discussing. Could you say that God willfully associates himself with this? Is he drawing creation up toward him? Or is creation sort of erupting out toward God?

Dr. Tillich: You see this is a question that concerns the problem of providence The word "providence," like most of the other old terms, needs purging. In my *Systematic Theology,* I call providence the "directing creativity of God." But providence is not only an originating power; it also maintains — its second aspect.

This second aspect of providence is its power to preserve the structure, which is the same act of course as creation, but seen from the point of view of continuation

And then there is a third aspect, a directing toward a *telos,* or aim. The whole problem of miracles falls under this third form of providence or divine creativity, namely, a creating in such a way that, in the interplay of divine creativity and creaturely freedom (not only in man, but in every creature), this interplay becomes the continuous creativity of God in the context of reality as a whole.

I think it is very good that you have asked this question. It brings us to the over-all framework within which miracles can happen. This framework is not one of deterministic necessity — neither in the Cartesian nor in the Calvinistic sense, nor even in the amalgamation of Cartesianism and Calvinism in the later Calvinist doctrine of predestination.

And still another thing is implied here: a contingent happening in reality which has no direction. There is contingency in reality, and we call this in the biological realm (at least I call it so) the "spontaneity" of plants and biological beings, and perhaps even atoms. In man we call it "freedom." The directing creativity of God goes through the freedom and spontaneity of creatures. This is a good old Thomistic idea, namely, that God acts in the world by secondary causes, which means through the *inner* nature of the creaturely things themselves. The *inner* nature of living beings is spontaneity; and in the dimension of spirit, or man, it is freedom. So God doesn’t act from outside in a particular causality. The miracle situation is a situation in the context of God’s directing creativity, formerly called "providence."

Can a Secular Society Survive?

Student: I have another sort of question. First, you said that when religion in the broad or larger sense of the word becomes institutionalized in particular forms it is inevitably demonized, and then has to be reformed again and again. Also, you said that in the past humanistic societies, secular societies, have failed in the sense that they have become empty. Now what I would like to know is this: Would it not be possible, given our present secular society, to find and create within it the acknowledgment of religion in the larger sense, and to ignore religion in the particular sense, such as Christianity, because of the fact that its fate must always be a

demonization? Could we not then create a society which is secular but which is also conscious of religion in the larger sense?

Dr. Tillich: Yes, this is a question which is in the minds of many people. First of all, this attitude is actualized by many who decline to participate in any way, or so they think, in religion in the narrower sense. They devote themselves to art, literature, human relations, science, philosophy, and have some consciousness of moral principles and so on. They are not unusual.

But your question would actually involve another question: Is a completely secular state possible? My answer is, of course, that it is not possible in terms of the larger concept of religion, because in all forms of life, in political groups for instance the ultimate appears in some way or another. If it did not, if the state became completely a matter of personal hedonistic or utilitarian calculation, then it would come to an end.

So I would formulate your question this way: In the long run, is a lack of concrete historical religion possible without total secularization or profanization of life, which in turn would result in self-destruction of society?

My answer to you must be that, without the concreteness of the religious experience in terms of specific symbols and devotional activities, and community participation in them, there results in the long run a disappearance of the substance of religion. It becomes thinner and thinner. It is reduced to occasional feelings that one might or might not experience. Its power is gone. And when I offer this answer, think of it as a confession of the sin of all mankind, namely, that mankind is not able to feel the divine fully present in every moment of its life. We cannot pray without intermission. This, of course, if taken literally, seems absurd, but it implies something beyond the literal meaning. It means that the experience of the presence of the divine, and our elevation of it, should be possible in every moment; but it is not.

The ideal is that God lives within us, and therefore we have no need of temples or of services. It is interesting that, again and again in church history, people have realized this. One whom I know especially well is Luther, and he said, "We really do not need church services at all. We can be in direct communication with God. But for the masses, for the peasants, for the uneducated, we need the churches in order to maintain their relationship to God." Now I myself would apply this rule to all of us; we are all poor people because we all have the fundamental tendency toward the secular, toward going out of the presence of God, fleeing from God. And religions are the restraining, the balancing power. They are not necessary in the ultimate sense, in the essential sense of the word; but they are necessary in the existential sense because of man’s existential estrangement. For this reason I would say that people should now be allowed to regain a religious feeling outside the church, since they are not able to have it within, partly because of themselves and partly because of the failures of the churches. But let us remember the fact that the churches are the treasure chests in which the religious substance is preserved.

Very often they are locked shut; we cannot get into them; the religious substance only stands on the altar, so to speak, but doesn't radiate into our life. It is then understandable to hear believers say, "We don't care; we have the divine somewhere else." But sometimes the treasure chest opens itself again, and then it is very important that there be at least a group of people who can participate in it and in its great rituals and symbolic power. That is my answer to your question.

Professor: Dr. Tillich, looking at the faces of your audience, I sense one or two questions from agnostic listeners. One may infer from your remark that a government may degenerate, in a purely secular state, to where it becomes a selfish struggle for power and then destroys itself. But is there a necessary identification of secular with selfish? The question originally was: Why cannot a purely secular state continue and recognize virtue and the sort of thing which is necessary to keep the state going, with due respect for law and so on? Why is this not possible in the secular? Why is "secular" always identified with selfishness?

Dr. Tillich: Not with selfishness, but with utilitarianism. This is a rather larger concept. I would say this, that so long as there is, as in Immanuel Kant, the concept of an ultimate concern with respect to duty and obligation and commitment, the state is not secularized; it may not be related to a concrete religion, but it is not secularized. If we then proceed to nineteenth-century philosophy, to people like Mill and the utilitarians like Bentham and so on, we encounter the phenomenon of naturalistic secularization The situation has slipped out of the first or broad concept of religion. Then I would say there is no reliance on anybody, in principle anyway. We have wide areas in the world, and in some sections of this country too, where there is no such reliance because of naturalistic attitudes towards life. Should this attitude be held consistently (now nothing is consistent in life), people would simply calculate every issue, "Can I break the law here without punishment and so on?"

Professor: Why cannot the schools take the place of the churches? In schools, we could continually inculcate ideals of service and virtue and respect for law, on the ground that they are necessary to keep society together. If this were done, why should not the naturalistic or the secular attitude be sufficient?

Dr. Tillich: Yes, now we come to the second question: Can this unconditional concern, in the sense of my first broad concept of religion, survive in the long run and not deteriorate into pure naturalism, without having a set of symbols? This is the question. The symbolic representation of the holy produces the feeling of unconditional seriousness, or a sense of the holy. If we inculcate or indoctrinate, as you call it (a questionable thing to do), or if we try to radiate through the teacher something of unconditional concern in terms of the prevailing ethical norm, then we have something holy. We consider our duties sacred or holy as Kant did. That is clear and obvious. But this holiness is reduced then to duty and does not have a profounder source in being and reality itself. I doubt that the holy itself, without the symbols for holiness, can retain its unconditional character for us. I do not know. There is no experience in mankind to prove that it can. There is evidence that for some time an original religious substance still operates in

people in a society that has become secular. But in time — and historical development shows this process to be rapid once the religious substance is lost — the sense of duty and responsibility degenerates and becomes naturalistic calculation. So it was in Greece; so it is in modern times. And then the phenomenon of emptiness sets in with all the reactions it produces. Now that is my vision of these cycles.

Professor: The agnostic wants to know why the school cannot embody these symbols without any reference to the holy?

Dr. Tillich: No. Then it remains merely an imperative without a source of this imperative, without an ultimate source. Of course the schoolteacher can be a priest in character, even if not a priest in a church; he fulfills the same thing. But I know that you mean the school in its essential nature, a completely secular institution which dispenses knowledge. And through knowledge alone we cannot achieve this. And we can also say that knowledge of moral law does not give us the feeling for the holiness of the moral law.

So the question is: What can give us the feeling for the holiness of the moral law? I think that history has shown — and it is my personal experience, too — that only the vision of the holy itself, of that ground of our own being on which we depend, can make us take the moral law with ultimate seriousness. What the teacher as mere teacher says, if he is not a devout person, produces resistance first of all. Then if the resistance is broken by brainwashing or indoctrination, the moral imperative becomes simply a matter of anxiety or tradition. But it is not the thing that Luther called "doing the good lovingly." That is the only real moral imperative — the principle of love. The principle of love cannot be conveyed by merely teaching what the law is.

Professor: Would you say then that this cannot be a mere intellectual experience? One has to have an existential, personal, inner experience?

Dr. Tillich: I would say, first of all, a total experience of the whole person must be involved, in which the emotional and will elements are implied as much as the intellectual. If the teacher is a priest he can achieve that, of course. I refer now to a priestly person, a reverent person, even if he is not a priest; the word "priest" to me means one who radiates the presence of the holy itself. And this is a matter of the whole person and his existential involvement. This, I believe, is possible only in the short run, not in the long run. In the short run everything is possible, even healing. But in the long run even Jesus' healing was not sufficient; his followers all died. In the same way we must say that, in the long run, a state of emptiness takes place, and what to do with that state is another question. In my opinion, we can redeem it only through overarching religious symbols in which the holy itself is expressed.

This problem was recognized even by the Nazis. Hitler was very stupid intellectually, but, up to a certain point, also tremendously intuitive. His instinct failed him when special aspects of his

character drove him to become the "great general," which he was not. He had a remarkable political sense and realized that an empty space existed in the whole German nation, and this empty space had to be filled. The symbol he used to accomplish it was "the German race." Hitler used this symbol, and the Communists came to power in a very similar fashion, offering to the minds of dissatisfied people a set of great symbols, with implications of an enormous amount of meaningful activity. And their emptiness was overcome. Finally, in this sense I would say that emptiness drives the human mind toward certain strong reactions, and if they are not creatively good ones they can become very evil indeed.

Professor: In the long run, then, Dr. Tillich, schools and other secular institutions cannot by themselves continue to convey this heritage or "substance of the holy," and it is finally lost sight of. And we may call an institution a school, but the moment the symbols used prove adequate to convey the substance of the holy, or of an unconditional concern, then in a sense we have a church, since we are performing the same functions. However, what in the contemporary humanist world we call "school" does not in fact achieve this.

Dr. Tillich: You see, I have experienced both types of schools. When I was six years old, I entered a public school in eastern Germany which was a confessional school, completely Lutheran, as Germany was altogether. And there we had classes in religion for at least four hours a week. I learned the catechism; I learned the biblical stories; I learned the hymns. And I was a person for whom these symbols were more than adequate. They were received avidly by my subconscious and even by my consciousness, and they remained there. They have been alive there ever since. Then I went to the *Gymnasium*, which is a mixture of high school and college, and it was secular. Religion was either nonexistent or was studied in connection with philosophy. But my development was still determined by the earlier public school experience. Then I entered the university, where the teaching was also completely secular, and I became entirely free of any authoritarian religion. But I would say that, in those schools where religion was not taught, something was lacking.

Germany was still in the Bismarckian era, so something else was indoctrinated by teachers — a terrible nationalism. It was a Germanic nationalism, predecessor of Hitler's. These schoolteachers were secular, but their secular emptiness was filled by their nationalism. And this was a wonderful soil for the distorted nationalism of Hitler. It did not have the expressive powerful symbols which Hitler — that was his genius — gave them. But it was there. Now the present danger is that if the public schools and the colleges and universities cannot communicate a meaning of life even in terms of the first concept of religion, of ultimate concern, then emptiness takes over. And very soon the emptiness begins to be filled with demonic things. Nationalism is demonic, of course, if it be comes "ultimate."

In Germany we were indoctrinated in the history classes, in the literature classes, in the philosophy classes, and everywhere with this kind of royal Prussian nationalism and the German nationalism growing out of a sense of inferiority. These two types were different and

often in conflict. The Prussian had something of the old Kantian duty idea, and so it was better. But the imperial German concern was simply: How can we overcome all the other nations around us if they threaten us, or perhaps even if they don't? Now this was the basis of our foreign policy, and there was hatred of England just because England was by far the most powerful of the European nations at that time. This hatred was indoctrinated in us, and for me it took much inner purging and a trip to England, and a love for the English people, to overcome that false indoctrination. Of course, France was the hereditary enemy. And it took my love for the French language, and then for French wines, to overcome this kind of indoctrination. It was not easy.

Must Ultimate Concern Be Self-Conscious?

Student: I have a question which concerns people whom I think we have all met. Perhaps some would label them "ignorant," but this is not necessarily true. They just don't ask questions about the meaning of life. They seem to be living fully in their own secular spheres. Now my question is: Can the ultimate be experienced without acknowledgment of it? If so, is there a point at which recognition and acknowledgment must come before the individual can grow to his full capacity?

Dr. Tillich: What is the word "it" here in your question? I did not understand.

Student: Can the ultimate be experienced without the acknowledgment of the ultimate?

Dr. Tillich: Oh! Without consciousness that we have an ultimate concern? Of course, and we can live like that. People do live under the moral imperative where the ultimate is implied, and do not know they are living under an ultimate concern; that happens all the time.

Student: But it is necessary, in order to grow fully, that this be acknowledged?

Dr. Tillich: Now you see, all this, this growth, happens when conflicts arise. For instance, one "ultimate" concern is challenged by another potential one. And then one has to make a decision. Then these concerns rise into consciousness automatically. It is not effected by teachers or brought about by seminar discussion; it is very rare that something like that occurs. Growth develops through life experiences in which the ultimates change. Perhaps the ultimate was once actually the parents, or the mother — as in this country, or the father — as in Germany, and served as a divine-demonic ultimate. Later another ultimate, perhaps a loved one, girl or boy, liberates us from this. But then the question may arise: What is the ultimate meaning of my relationship to my parents or to marriage, and how are these conflicts to be solved? That is one example.

In terms of indoctrination with nationalism, when we go beyond national borders by reading or

traveling — and traveling is especially feared by all Fascists — we encounter other realities. And then we may find ourselves in conflict with our indoctrination.

Or if we belong to a particular religion, and then find attraction in another religious form; a decision must be made. Or often we are torn by conflict of concrete duties. All these things awaken the consciousness, the awareness of an ultimate concern, because we have to decide what is really our ultimate. About what, or for what, do we commit our life, or inner life? It is good for these problems to become conscious, since we must then decide, and growth may consequently result.

Student: Perhaps this question simply puts the same problem in another way. But would you say that this self-consciousness or awareness of ultimate concern interferes with any communion with God? Would it be better not to have this self-consciousness?

Dr. Tillich: No. For if we are conscious of this concern, we can reject it. And if we do not have full freedom to reject it, we do not possess it in its full meaning, either. And therefore I would say that, even if this awakening involves disturbances for the immediate religious life of the child or adult, the risk must be taken in order to reach full humanity.

Professor: Dr. Tillich, are you saying then that the snake was good for Eve and Adam?Dr. Tillich: Oh, certainly. I have praised the "tree of knowledge" of good and evil. Without this, man would always have remained in "dreaming innocence" or in a relationship to God where full humanity, the intended freedom for love, could never have developed. And therefore the Fall is, to quote Augustine, *felix culpa,* which means "happy guilt" — guilt that is necessary in order to actualize the potentialities which are in man. And I could even say symbolically that God "took a risk" with man, and later saw, when he brought the great flood over him, that this risk had resulted in failure. But it was not a complete failure. For there was Noah, and although God "repented" for having created man, he had joy in Noah. I mean that, despite human weaknesses, there is something in man that God did not want to destroy. Now, symbolically — if not taken literally — this is a very profound story. It is important for our present situation. God took a risk, and we must take a risk. He took a risk in permitting man to reach his full humanity, for only if we are able to say No to God can we really love him. If we do not have this possibility, then love is simply identity.

Student: You spoke of spontaneity as an aspect of this freedom. Could you clarify this?

Dr. Tillich: I use the word spontaneity here for animals and plants, and probably even molecules; there is an element of spontaneity in their development, but I cannot describe this process fully. I learned the fact from biologists and neurologists. This participation in divine creativity by all creatures is the "risk" God took, and where he "anticipated" possible failure. And in that wonderful old story he repented that he had created man.

Student: You have said that the religious fulfillment of the human being involves a conscious awareness of an ultimate concern or of something infinite —

Dr. Tillich: Yes. You mean the full development or maturity as Paul speaks of it — "not milk but meat." "Up until now you have been fed only milk, but now you are mature and can have meat."

Student: Now if a man is, in a similar way, consciously aware of his ultimate concern with a finite subject matter, is he in the same sense mature? Can he be at peace with himself in the same way?

Dr. Tillich: Here we are dealing with two concepts of maturity. I would say that some mature people can be aware of such finite concerns and can continuously fight with the devil. The medieval religious pictures show this. Some saints had much more to do with demons than the ordinary man. So we can be mature in this sense, namely, conscious of the situation and nevertheless compelled to fight with demons, which always means our idolatry for finite things, finite tendencies in ourselves, or concern for finite objects. Then we can point to a level of maturity which perhaps we should not call maturity but "blessedness." Blessedness overcomes the inner conflicts, and can be only partially reached in this world. But we can have moments of it when we feel at peace with ourselves. For instance, after prayer for forgiveness this might sometimes happen, although usually not, even if we are quite mature. So we do well to distinguish these two stages: maturity, on the one hand, which means full consciousness and the actualizing of one’s freedom; and on the other, blessedness, in which the inner conflicts that are connected with freedom are solved, at least fragmentarily.

Student: I think we ask this question about ultimate concern because we think that if life has no meaning then it is not worth living. I would like to suggest that these are two separate questions. I insist that, although I see no ultimate meaning in life, it is certainly worth living.

Dr. Tillich: Now, I would say that if you don’t see an ultimate meaning, you cannot use the term "worth." What does this term mean? Worth is a value judgment, obviously. And it is measured by something. I mean by this statement that, measured by the inner potentiality of man, a life that does not take anything with ultimate seriousness is not worth living.

But the words "worth living" can also mean, as in your question, something different. It can mean: It is hard to live life, it is burdensome. This is a very interesting problem. Can people live happily who have decided that they have no ultimate concern, and simply live from day to day having as much fun as possible? If a bad time comes — too bad! But they go on, for next time may be good. Now such an attitude could not apply, for instance, to the innumerable human beings in situations where "having fun" is no longer possible. Consider the millions of people who suffered in concentration camps. In those places the idea of having a good time continuously simply could not exist. Yet I know some who escaped after many years and who

retained a meaning for their lives. The temptation was to just lie down and die. But there were some who resisted even this temptation. Some, of course, were indirectly killed by the Nazis. But this indirect killing was not always successful; there were strong people who survived and who are now very important people in the society in which they live. And we can apply this principle to the inmates of prisons, and to others all over the world who are in a similar situation. For them, the "have fun" syndrome does not work.

Then the final question remains: Does it work at all? Or are there moments in which even those who have the external opportunity for this have-a-good-time philosophy feel how empty it all is, how meaningless it becomes afterwards? It seems very enticing as long as we do not have the opportunity. But after a certain time, when we do have it, it loses its power. The problem of ultimacy arises out of this.

NOTES:

1. Werner Keller, *The Bible as History* (New York: William Morrow, 1956).

return to religion-online

Ultimate Concern - Tillich in Dialogue by D. Mackenzie Brown

Donald Mackenzie Brown is Chairman of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of California in Santa Barbara. This book was published in 1965 by Harper & Row, Publishers. This book was prepared for Religion Online by Harry W. and Grace C. Adams.

Eighth Dialogue

Professor: I have talked with the members of the seminar and we have agreed that in this last meeting, which is our final opportunity to pursue questions with Dr. Tillich, we need to keep the discussion as relevant as possible. They have asked me if I would present the major questions that remain important to them after all our previous meetings.

The first and rather startling question is: "Dr. Tillich, are you not a dangerous man?"

Is Paul Tillich a Dangerous Man?

Dr. Tillich: Yes.

Professor: You are not supposed to comment yet! This is only the first sentence. It is a sincere question from one student. Are you not a dangerous man? You make paradoxical statements which weaken people's confidence in symbols and liturgies and churches. And you tend to destroy their belief, without giving them anything to replace it. Now you are the most influential theologian of the twentieth century, but are you not primarily an apostle to the intellectuals, speaking in their language? When you broadcast your concepts, do you not harm those people who are unable to comprehend, and will only misapply your ideas?

I cannot resist the temptation here to anticipate Dr. Tillich's reply. I believe that he would agree that he is dangerous, in the sense that honest or courageous statements may involve danger to some. Theologians and thinkers, back to biblical times, have had this same problem. Can you think of one who had any significant influence, who was not misunderstood, or who did not inadvertently cause some suffering and dismay?

The real danger to individuals, he might say, is not so much loss of belief, but the danger that

beliefs will lose the power which alone gives them symbolic meaning. So that when you criticize a person for "destroying faith," it may be beside the point, since the real danger is that the beliefs involved are losing their power anyway and becoming empty. Then it's important for someone to show a way in which valid faith can be restored. It is to prevent the emptiness, to preserve religion in the broad sense from secularization, that Dr. Tillich takes the calculated risk of criticizing. Now let us permit him to speak in his own defense.

Dr. Tillich: By far the most influential theologian up to now, up to 1963 in this century, is Karl Barth. He really made church history in his fight against Nazism and his construction of a special type of liberal theology. Karl Barth spoke in a very particular situation to a very particular group of people. He spoke to those who, in themselves, were attached to the church and who stood, as theologians or laymen, on the boundary line of a liberalism which might finally have led to so-called Germanic Christianity. And he saved Christianity from this pitfall. This is his achievement in church history and his greatness. I refer not only to German theology but to the European churches who had to fight against similar attempts during the Nazi period, and Barth saved them. But then the people who fought under his leadership in the struggle against Nazism, and often became martyrs in the fight, were victorious at the end of the war and became the leading persons in German and other Protestant churches — in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Holland, and elsewhere.

And something happened. The so-called intelligentsia — the people who cannot escape the sad destiny of having to think — was left alone. These people were left in a desert, and they were conscious of this all the time. The result was a continuing secularization which, after the heat of the fight with Nazism, occurred again in Germany and in Europe. So we have now a large group of people whom I would prefer to call the "thinking and doubting people" in respect to the Christian tradition. There are thinking people who do not doubt, although I cannot imagine how this is possible; but there are also many thinking people who do doubt and even more of them who have doubted but do so no longer. They have simply rejected Christianity and every other religion. This is the actual situation.

Now who speaks for them? This was the concern of Bultmann when he wrote his famous article on the demythologization of the New Testament.[1] He wanted to protect persons who accept the Christ from *having* also to accept the world view of the people who lived when Jesus was born — the three-level pre-Copernican world, with divine beings on one level and man on another, and demonic beings on still another. This concept belongs partly to the Greek world view and partly to the mythological language of the New Testament, which is good and has to be used, in my opinion. But if this language is to be used, it has to be understood. Bultmann is even more radical; he does not want to use it at all, and in my talks with him I have insisted that we cannot get rid of the symbols and myths but must interpret them in a nonliteralistic way. Otherwise, of course, they would be meaningless for all time.

I presuppose in my theological thinking the entire history of Christian thought up until now, and

I consider the attitude of those people who are in doubt or estrangement or opposition to everything ecclesiastical and religious, including Christianity. And I have to speak to them. My work is with those who ask questions and for them I am here. For the others, who do not, I have the great problem of tact. Of course, I cannot avoid speaking to them because of a fear of becoming a stumbling block for primitive believers. When I am preaching a sermon — and then I am quite aware of what I'm doing — I speak to people who are unshaken in their beliefs and in their acceptance of symbols, in a language which will not undermine their belief. And to those who are actually in a situation of doubt and are even being torn to pieces by it, I hope to speak in such a way that the reasons for their doubts and other stumbling blocks are taken away. On this basis I speak also to a third group, one which has gone through these two stages and is now able again to hear the full power of the message, freed from old difficulties. I can speak to those people, and they are able to understand me, even when I use the old symbols, because they know that I do not mean them in a literal sense.

I have answered this question very often, as it is raised by ministers. Another way to solve such problems would be discussion groups for church congregations in the evenings led by a minister not connected with the liturgical procedures. Liturgies have an atmosphere of holiness which is necessary and good and very important for a devotional service. But such an atmosphere is not so appropriate for a discussion. The intellect is also a God-given function, and I resent it very much when somebody accuses the theologian of sin when he thinks. This is his job. He is not a nurse, although he may have to become one in some moments. His business is a very well-defined business: namely, to think, although he cannot of course think about these things without being in the "circle," as I call it in my *Systematic Theology* — the theological circle. He must stand in the atmosphere of the religious reality in which he speaks, but this does not mean that he should be forbidden to speculate. The word "speculate" has become a word of contempt, although it means to look carefully at something — *speculari* in Latin. It does not mean flying up and over the clouds. It means looking care fully at the structure of reality. And in this sense I am willing to speculate. The problem of the danger of thinking and of criticizing beliefs you have stated so well that I do not need to repeat it.

The really dangerous people have been the great critics since the Enlightenment, and especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. *They* could be called dangerous. But what I do is something quite different. After these dangerous people, these courageous people, have done their job and have undercut and destroyed the primitivism of religious literalism, I try to recreate the old realities on another basis. Now many people are not as far along in their own development as the whole historical situation of theology is. They remain still in the post-Reformation period of fundamentalist thought. The "word of God" is just what orthodox theologians of the year 1620 wrote. They think that this is *the* word of God for all times, although actually it is only the word of the theologians of the year 1620, in Germany and in Holland mostly — only that.

So to speak to those who have questions and are "in the situation," and also, at the same time, to

others who are often two or more hundred years behind in their understanding and knowledge of the religious and theological situation is certainly dangerous. But if we think of this whole thing as waves on a river we simply try to determine what we can do — what Barth did in his way, what I do in my way, and what Bultmann and Reinhold Niebuhr have done. We take it for granted that most of our listeners understand the whole development of liberal theology; for that development has now been completed; we do not explore it publicly any more. We presuppose it, and on this presupposition we try to be constructive. Now the "danger" of doing this was pointed out once by my friend Nels Ferre, who wrote about it and has been quoted hundreds of times since then. Nevertheless we remain good friends. And that's my answer to your question.

"Apostle to the Intellectual"

Professor: Then to sum up: You would accept the designation of "dangerous"; you would accept the designation of apostle to the intellectual.

Dr. Tillich: Now that is much too high an estimate, but I am interested in the situation of the intellectuals, and I am trying to interpret the Christian message in a new way to them.

Professor: Then if you had a group of those who accepted the symbols literally, you would speak to them in that language if possible. But since it is not possible always to speak only to those who are in one category or another, it is inevitable that those who accept Christianity in a fundamentalist and literal sense will hear and misunderstand a part of what is being said?

Dr. Tillich: Yes. Now this is really the problem of preaching. I believe that it would be hard for you to find in my sermons any directly negative statements, even against literalism. I simply restrain myself in that situation. For instance, the resurrection stories: I do not criticize in my sermons the highly poetic symbolic story of the empty tomb, although I would do so in my theology and have done it in my books. But I speak of what happened to Paul and the other apostles, as Paul describes it in I Corinthians 15. Now that is a preaching method I would recommend for all sermons.

Student: Dr. Tillich, this problem didn't occur to me until now, but since you've mentioned it, I don't see how you could talk to a group of people who took the symbolism of the Bible literally without becoming concerned over the idolatry that is expressed in their literal interpretations.

Dr. Tillich: You are right. My answer is very simple: if they ask, I answer. If they do not ask, and I am expected to give aid and comfort in some situation in life, as at funerals, then there are those great words of Paul, I Corinthians 15.[2] In such moments the question of literalism or nonliteralism does not exist, for we have the power of the word. But sometimes a group of people who are still in the literalistic attitude begin to ask. Children especially are always asking very profound religious questions. I have often told this story of my daughter when she was six years old. We were walking through an Alpine meadow, and suddenly she asked, "Why is all

this so? Here is the meadow, there the trees and there the mountain. Why isn't it all different?" Now that is an expression of transcosmological argument, in a primitive way, but as deep as Kant himself. Only Kant could state it conceptually, and my daughter was expressing her first shock of "Why is that so and not different?" Which is only one side of the more fundamental question: Why is there something? Why is there not nothing? Why is it this way and not another way? This kind of questioning by children comes very early. I always answer them; I talk with children on the level they can understand, but I would never hide anything. The worst thing, and I censure them sincerely, is the reply of some Sunday-school teachers, when children ask questions: "You must not ask, you must believe." My reaction to that is very barbaric: I would say, "Throw those teachers out tomorrow morning! Forever!"

Monasticism and the Priesthood

Professor: Now for the second question: Do you not underestimate the real problem of religious seeking and perfection? Intellectual analysis is important, but in the end a great deal of discipline is necessary. Whether in a monastic life or by way of church participation or mystical contemplation or devoted service to *mankind*, total commitment is essential, not just — well, we won't use "speculation" again — not just thinking.

Dr. Tillich: Yes, of course. Now, in order to be a Christian or to be a fully developed personality — this can be expressed humanistically or religiously — you have to be involved substantially in something. We can call it commitment, but the word has to me a very bad sound. I do not like it. It has been so much abused, and there is also the problem of the possibility of making a vow. I would say that such vows are impossible; we cannot commit ourselves to anything *absolutely.* And it follows, therefore, that divorce should be possible in Protestant ethics. A vow for life in any respect is impossible, because it gives to the finite moment in which we are willing to do this an absolute superiority above all other later moments in our life.

Professor: This would apply to the vow of marriage?

Dr. Tillich: Yes.

Professor: Or to the vow of monastic discipline?

Dr. Tillich: Yes, yes, to all of them. I deny the possibility of a vow because of the finitude of the finite. A vow, if is an absolute commitment, would make the moment in which we make it infinite or absolute. Other moments may come which reveal the relativity of the moment in which this decision was once made.

Professor: In other words, this vow should be continually renewed in the existential situations

of experience?

Dr. Tillich: Renewed or not renewed, according to the situation, yes. It is of course a decision, and a decision has consequences. We cannot just jump in and out of situations at will. These things we all know. But a decision should not have an absolute, unconditionally binding power.

Marriage and Divorce

Professor: What's going to happen to all our marriages if this is accepted?

Dr. Tillich: Some might be divorced, but that is what is happening already. Of course, here again we have the point of view of the Protestant, which is very sensitive; the Protestant ethic refuses to make one moment or one decision absolute, it is quite possible that a situation may occur when it is morally better, more in the line of agape, love, to be flexible. Agape is not only the absolute principle but also the flexible principle. The greatness of love is that it is not only absolute but also flexible, according to the concrete situation. Therefore there are situations which I often have to discuss with people, where the flexibility element of agape is necessary to the resolution of the problem.

Professor: Now on the positive side, in support of this, then, one might say that this attitude would assure that there would be no hypocrisy, and that the relationship was a genuine one, whether it was marriage or monastic life or anything else. It insures integrity and sincerity. On the other side, against your position, could you not say that "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak," and that the strength of a vow is what keeps our Franciscan Father as he is, at times when he might temporarily wish he were not committed — a feeling in moments of weakness, personal disadvantage, and so on? Is this not true of any other decisive position? Suppose, in a marriage, in a moment of bitterness one could throw the other one out, what would happen to the stability of human institutions?

Dr. Tillich: Now we are not all California movie stars. We have an intimate relationship to other human beings. For instance, the possibility that my dedication to theology and philosophy could be broken has never entered my mind. Even in some desperate moment, concrete moments when I tried to escape out of theology completely and flee into philosophy — which I could have done easily, in terms of external conditions — the vow (which I never gave of course, but which was my internal drive to be a theologian) was very strong and kept me at it. But I never said to myself, "If I abandon theology, I will break my vow." There are others whom I actually counseled to leave theology, because they were defeated by it; they had chosen theology, but it was impossible for them to continue because of the whole inner structure of their spiritual life.

Professor: Then a true vow is to be true to yourself, not to any particular statement of a moment?

Dr. Tillich: Yes, now, you see, all these situations stand under the principle of agape. If we see them only in abstract terms, it would seem that we could go jumping about in this or that direction, but that is not the reality. The reality is that if we abandon a direction of our life which we have chosen, and which has many foundations in our past and is still a power in our present, it is a heartbreaking thing. And only in an utter boundary-line situation or crisis should it be done in very serious matters.

Professor: Could you define agape once more?

Dr. Tillich: Agape is that form of love in which God loves us, and in which we are to love our neighbor especially if we do not like him. I think this paradox is most characteristic; would you agree?

Franciscan Father: I would.

Professor: Our third question is this: You say, on page 92 in the last chapter of your book, *Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions:* "The ritual element was devaluated by the Reformation, in the theology of both the great reformers and of the evangelical radicals. One of the most cutting attacks of Luther was directed against the 'vita religiosa,' the life of the 'homini religiosi,' the monks. God is present in the secular realm; in this view Renaissance and Reformation agree. It was an important victory in the fight of God against religion." Now since monks devote their lives to a search for the divine, is this not at least one of the legitimate possibilities in man's pursuit of the ultimate? Why then was Luther's action a victory when it deprived the Protestant world of the monastic alternative? There is not very much of the monastic life in the Protestant religion; there is a little in the Lutheran and a little in the Anglican, but, by and large, the Protestant world has lost this important alternative.

Layman and Monk

Dr. Tillich: Now when I refer to Luther, the situation is very clear. For Luther was a monk himself, one of the most ascetic, and full of the vitality which drove beyond asceticism; and in these struggles he came to the conviction that monastic work is not better than the layman's work. What he fought against was the conviction that the monastic work was somehow nearer to God, in principle of course. I mean, every Catholic would admit that there are bad monks and good monks, just as there are bad businessmen and good business men as Christians. But that is not the principal consideration here. The principal consideration is whether on the highest level the ascetic, monastic life is superior to the active life in the world. (Let us always think of the businessman, because he is considered a kind of opposite.)

As for the "superiority" of the *homini religiosi* — it is obvious that the use of this term presupposes the knowledge that what were known in medieval Latin as *homini religiosi,*

religious men, were the monks. And the very fact that this word was applied to them shows that the really religious life was thought to be the life of a monk. And against this idea — that was one aspect of it — Luther revolted in the name of the secular world. The Reformation is largely a secular revolt against the religious life as being superior to the secular life.

The other aspect was that the kind of work done in monasticism, religious work, was believed to constitute the merit required in order to deserve the grace of God, more than could be expected by those who did not do this sort of work. Luther denied this because he had rediscovered the idea of grace alone, the idea that divine grace alone makes it possible for us to be accepted by God. This is what I call in my *Courage To Be* the acceptance of acceptance — the acceptance of the fact that we are accepted. And that is unconditional; it comes from God.

In the monastic tradition of his time there was much of what Luther called "work" — salvation by work, by intensive asceticism, discipline, self-control, and so on. Luther consulted his heart and came to the solution that work does not save in itself. He found his saving grace when he read — I think in III John 16 — that it is grace alone that makes us just before God. That is the reason for Luther's stand.

Concerning the possible loss of an alternative in Protestant ism, I believe that Protestantism not only won something in its victory over the concept of monasticism, but also indeed lost something: namely, the possibility of religious consecration, of religious concentration or contemplation, without work in the sense that Luther used the word — work done to obtain one's eternal life and in the hope of gaining superiority over the layman. Accordingly, an idea is now often discussed in Protestantism that would encourage laymen, anyone, to enter at some time or other the atmosphere of the monastery. There might even be some people who would be inclined to stay there and live that life. That is a possibility, and Protestantism has experimented with it and is discussing it.

Professor: What we could call religious retreats?

Dr. Tillich: Yes, now the word "retreat" already approximates this idea. Usually a retreat last for only three days or so, but what I was describing involves a substantial period of experience. I know that the St. Michael's Brotherhood in

Germany, to which I belonged before Hitler threw me out, was an attempt to bring these things back into Protestantism without the two distortions of which I have spoken. The idea of monasticism is extremely complicated, and I agree with the questioner that something is lost, something is gone. But at least the distortion that God is closer to the *homo religiosus* or the "religionist" — to use a most ugly English word — than he is to the baker or the shoemaker or the businessman, has been destroyed.

Professor: But you have in Catholicism, and in Buddhism and other Oriental systems, the idea

that as a part of a serious religious endeavor it is important, desirable, perhaps even essential, to have a close and completely dedicated association with others in the same pursuit. And this means separation for a time from the ordinary demands of life. This, as you know, represents a stage of the ideal Hindu life. One is to be separated from all considerations, political, economic, familial, and the rest, and devote oneself to contemplation. This concept in different form is still evident in the Catholic world. If retreats are only the occasional visits of laymen, can they hope to do what, for example, the Trappist order is doing in Kentucky, where a group of monks, withdrawn into a silent world, have abandoned ordinary secular pleasures and pursuits?

Dr. Tillich: I refer now to the old struggles in the early monastic groups and the monastic forms that developed in Egypt and later on in the East, where the problem arose concerning the relationship of the inner contemplative life, the prayer life, to the active life. St. Benedict[3] and his monastic reform were largely responsible for combining the contemplative element with the work element — for the insistence on the necessity of working. And I think this seems to be the Protestant view.

Now here I would like to ask our visiting Father about the Franciscans' way of doing it. They did not live a monastic life so much by ordinary work as by going around and helping people in all kinds of ways and begging. This is always the problem of monasticism: Is a merely contemplative life sound? Or is it self-destructive? People of the greatness of St. Francis were fully aware of the problem, as was St. Benedict certainly. Their monks always had tasks. Now the combination of these tasks with contemplation was, at least, the ideal.

Why was it important that the monks should work? We can answer this question in two ways. We can say that monks must work for their own health — I do not mean bodily health, although perhaps that was also involved — but for their own inner spiritual health. Only to contemplate is impossible. Or we can say that there is so much to be done in the world that we need monks, who are in a special relationship to God, to help show us the direction toward the actualization of the Kingdom of God in history. This is what the Catholic Sisters were doing in Germany when they worked to drain the swamps and clear the forests, and at other necessary tasks that were needed for the life of the province where I was born, in which Berlin now is. The psychological question is: Did they do it because they thought that this must be done with a view toward the actualization of the Kingdom of God on earth, or did they do it because they said to themselves, "We must work; otherwise our spiritual life will be unhealthy"? If the latter, I would not esteem their labor so highly; I would say that such labor, in that spirit, does not overcome religious egocentricity. But of the first answer, which seems obviously to apply to these Sisters, I would say that their work was justified and that it had, for that period, a tremendous historical power and necessity. Now I don't know if the Father would agree with that.

Franciscan Father: Well, there are a number of ideas here. First of all, I would agree with Dr. Tillich on this whole problem of agape. I would say that the main reason I remain faithful to my

monastic vows would be agape. If ever I came to the time where I was discontented with my monastic life, it would be that I had lost agape. In other words, I would say that if an individual had lost his spontaneous urge to live this particular way of life, something had gone wrong with him. So instead of getting a dispensation from his vows I would try to counsel that person to rediscover the impulse from God that had urged him initially to take the vow I would agree that adherence to agape is more important than adherence to monastic vows, but I see a very close relation to the two. And I see no conflict at all.

Dr. Tillich: But a possible conflict.

Franciscan Father: A possible conflict, yes. That's right. I would say the same thing. To put it forcefully I would not say that just because you are a monk, according to Christian terminology, you can save your soul or are necessarily any better than the layman. In the final estimate, you are judged by agape. Monastic vows are a means to agape. I wouldn't say that monasticism itself has shifted over the years, but I would say that now the church would not hold that there is any difference essentially between the life of the monk and the life of the layman. I think that is sound theology. Agape is the essence, and I would say that all laymen and monks, bishops and popes, are called to the same ideal of perfection. It is simply that some people are more contemplative by nature, others more active. And the ideal I would say would be the mixed life, the *vita mixta* lived by Christ himself. I would agree with Dr. Tillich that the ideal is not solely the contemplative life; the mixed life is the ideal. But there are some people who by nature are drawn toward one or another type of life, and I believe that grace, or God's doing, builds upon nature. So I think God goes along with what each one needs and can best do.

Professor: Dr. Tillich, may I ask, would you feel that refraining from marriage in the case of nuns and monks is justified in terms of their particular vocation or type of life?

Dr. Tillich: Oh, if they feel like it they should, of course. I mean I would not say that there is any law that one should marry. Not at all. And now I would also agree with the Father's statement that "God follows nature." This has my fullest approval. But if it appears after a time that an individual's nature has become quite different from what it was at the time that he or she as an enthusiastic young man or woman took vows, then God would probably demand that this person follow his or her nature, and serve him differently.

Franciscan Father: Well, I think there is a tendency in the church now to dispense more and more with the vows. In fact, I would say the time will come when celibacy will no longer be demanded for the clergy in the Roman Catholic church.

Dr. Tillich: Oh, I'm very glad to hear that!

Franciscan Father: There is a *tendency* that way.

Dr. Tillich: A tendency means two hundred years!

Franciscan Father: Albeit, I hate to wish that upon my successors. Well, again I think that any group, whether it be Protestant or Catholic, should be allowed to meet what we call the natural demands of a person. I think you should permit the *purely* contemplative life, the mixed, and that which is more active. So I think we should have that area of choice, and a person should be free to move from one to the other. You can't arbitrarily put yourself in one particular position and then hold on to that for dear life.

On the other hand, something has to be done about this so-called weakness of a person. This is a problem. I think if a person wished to leave the monastic life sincerely and in good faith, I would dispense him if I were the superior.

But if he were in good faith, I wouldn't approach the problem by arguing fidelity to a vow; I would get back to agape, or call it what you want. In other words, there is something more profound than observance of vows. Ultimately, in the sight of God, this is what counts more than external adherence to something that is merely church-made.

Professor: Then I take it, Dr. Tillich, you do accept the monastic life as a legitimate alternative?

Dr. Tillich: Yes, under these conditions, about which we now agree. But in the period of Luther this was by no means the case.

Student: Isn't it still an "advantage," in Catholicism, for an individual to join a religious order?

Franciscan Father: In the abstract, not in practice; not so far as individuals are concerned. If a person came up to me and said, "Now should I become a monk or not?" I couldn't answer. I wouldn't say, "Because the life of the monk is higher than the life of a layman, you should become a monk." I would have to judge the individual; he might even, as far as I'm concerned, be sinning *against agape* in trying to become a monk. This is purely theoretical, of course, because generally speaking, given the world as it is with its temptations, you do have, theoretically, additional means to grace. But when you come down to practice that doesn't mean too much, really.

Professor: Father, the Catholic church recognizes married saints as well as celibate saints?

Franciscan Father: Well, Pius XI said very clearly that everyone is called to the same essential degree of holiness. Everyone.

Professor: Then it can be achieved in any capacity?

Franciscan Father: Yes. I would say, though, that generally speaking and abstractly, there are more means in a religious life than in a lay state.

Professor: Fewer temptations?

Franciscan Father: Well, the essential temptation is there also. The essential temptation in life is pride, self-love — call it what you want — that is the essential temptation.

Pride and Self-Affirmation

Professor: You speak of pride, Father, and this is one thing that should be asked of Dr. Tillich. In his *The Courage To Be* and in many of his writings, one comes across the concept of courage and the importance of the individual's having the courage to be himself. This is, as he expresses it, derived from and dependent upon "being itself," or the "ground of being". And so far as an individual has the courage to be himself, he has "self-affirmation" and this self-affirmation is derived from the divine self-affirmation. Now how do we handle the problem of pride and ego here? Pride is, as you have indicated, the central problem of the great mystics such as St. John of the Cross. How do we distinguish the individual's self-affirmation in a legitimate sense from mere egotism and pride?

Dr. Tillich: The word "self-affirmation" is difficult. Perhaps we really should not use the term. Now here I simply quote Jesus, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." This means that he presupposes without saying it directly, that there is a natural self-affirmation in a person which should not prevent the affirmation of others. This would be the measure indicated in the Golden Rule. Self-affirmation is in everybody, in every animal; it is the basis of life. Otherwise, we could not protect ourselves against fire, water, and other dangers. And it should not be called self-love. The term "self-love" I reject completely. Augustine himself had difficulties with it. He had to distinguish between an ordered and an unordered self-love. Unordered self-love is what we would call selfishness today, and an ordered self-love is what I call "self-affirmation" simply in order to avoid a very misleading term.

Professor: Then by self-affirmation you must mean affirmation of the infinite rather than the finite.

Dr. Tillich: Now, yes, in the case of natural self-affirmation. There is another word in English, "selfishness," the meaning of which is without true self-love and really an affirmation of the finite; it results in self-hate and self-disgust. Here I refer with approval to my otherwise much-criticized friend, Erich Fromm. His analysis of self-love is very good.

Then there is a higher state which is the greatest form of self-affirmation, higher than the natural, namely, "self-acceptance in spite of." This is the most difficult thing: to have the right

agape toward oneself. But in order to avoid the linguistic confusion I would not call it self-love, but self-acceptance, because it is the acceptance of being accepted. So the word self-love no longer exists in my vocabulary. If it were consistently rejected by others, innumerable confusions in talks and dialogues could be avoided — for example, this almost primitive question, "Isn't our every act selfish?" The question involves a confusion between natural self-affirmation and selfishness. Such a confusion can be disastrous because it seems to prove that no good act is possible, since every act is selfish. In ethics this question is always being asked, and often out of nothing more than confusion, an innocent semantic confusion. Sometimes it is used as a justification for doing what one wants to do. That is rare. It is mostly a result of confusion. Very important for our consideration, then, are three concepts: natural self-affirmation; the negative distortion of it, selfishness; and the highest form of it, self-affirmation on the basis of being accepted in spite of being unacceptable. I think these concepts must be distinguished.

Professor: Then how would your theology, in this respect, tie in with the Catholic emphasis on pride as the great problem in monastic discipline? In the lives of the saints you come across this problem of pride over and over again. As they proceed to become more virtuous or more faithful or more understanding, the element of pride keeps emerging to negate all that they think they have done. How does this problem of pride appear to you?

Saint and Sinner

Dr. Tillich: Now it has to be looked at in the light of the principle of forgiveness, or acceptance of the unacceptable. For me, this is very important, because Protestantism has no saints. Another difficult thing that immediately springs to mind, and which we could discuss at length, is the Protestant emphasis on the sinfulness of the justified person; the sinner is justified, not he who is perfect. "Grace accepts the sinner." The saints in Paul's epistle — in his general address to the saints in the city — were far from any state of perfection, as the later chapters of the letters show. But they are saints. Why? Because they are accepted, by their "belongingness" to the church of Christ. They are not saints because they are *good* people. So I would say of this pride problem, as well as of the sex problem or the imagination problem: these are all temptations of the saints. Saints can be tempted. Saints are not good or perfect in that sense that they are superior to and above it all. I think the acknowledgment of this was a basic Protestant idea.

Professor: But the Catholic church doesn't think of the saints as having been perfect in their Lives. St. Augustine, in his confessions, makes it clear how much of a sinner he was. Would the Catholic church hold that, nevertheless, in some way the saint reaches a state of consciousness in which there is a qualitative difference between himself and others? Not that he looks upon himself as any better than anyone else, but that at least he has reached a point in which the ordinary temptations of pride and the appetites are to some degree transcended?

Dr. Tillich: But that is not the case!

Professor: Father, would you care to comment on that?

Franciscan Father: Well I wouldn't say that the saint would necessarily transcend all temptation — no. This is a complex thing. I would say, of course, that you would have to hold that the essence of sanctity is really the acceptance by God. In other words, it's more God's doing than the saints. I think you'd have to tilt the emphasis that way rather than toward the saint's own works. I would say that it is definitely by the grace of God, by agape, that a saint is a saint. But there is this element of human co-operation, which is a tremendous logical problem — I know I can't solve it, and greater minds than mine haven't solved it. There is some element in the saint's co-operation subsequent to, or consequent upon, God's laying hold of him.

Professor: But regardless of how it is reached, do you recognize any qualitative difference between the saint and the layman?

Franciscan Father: The layman can be a saint.

Professor: He *could* be.

Franciscan Father: Well, in fact many of them are. If I were Pope I'd canonize a number of lay people rather than some monks, I assure you.

Professor: Is there anything by which the term "saint" can have meaning, other than that of a nice man?

Dr. Tillich: Oh, yes, the transcendence.

Franciscan Father: Yes, transcendence.

Dr. Tillich: Transparence is better than transcendence. Transparency or translucency to the divine.

Professor: Doesn't Protestantism recognize this state of transparency?

Dr. Tillich: It would not deny it, but it would not apply it to some people. I would say that sometimes it happens to some people. Luther, for instance, was never considered to be anything like a saint, because he was always up and down, up and down, deep down near hell and then up again. And this is not a description of what is usually considered saintliness. In his down moments he was not transparent at all. I mean he himself felt it — that he was not transparent for others.

Franciscan Father: But I would still say that, in the sight of God, he could have been a saint. You see this recognition by the church is more or less of the perfect man, well-balanced. But it's a human recognition; it's not a divine recognition. Sainthood in the Catholic church means human recognition, which is, of course, supposed to follow after divine recognition. But there are many people who are divinely recognized and not humanly recognized.

Professor: We must then try to distinguish between Oriental concepts of the perfected or illumined individual and what the Christian church recognizes. Because in the Oriental tradition, as in the case of Buddha, there would be a stage in which the individual rises beyond temptation and transcends these human weaknesses. This would not be acceptable in Christian theology?

Dr. Tillich: No, it's not Catholic, and it is certainly not Protestant.

Student: Is that perfection a continuing state, then? Once they reach it then they may never ——?

Professor: Yes, it would be continuing.

Student: For how long?

Professor: It would be a permanent thing. It might not be recognized by the observer, but it would nevertheless be so; there would be no falling away once this was finally achieved. And the observer might see things which appeared to him as human weaknesses, but it would be held that, in truth, these were mere appearances, that Buddahood is a firm state from which there is no relapse.

Franciscan Father: Isn't there a difference between "falling away" and being tempted?

Professor: The temptation might be there, but it would not tempt.

Franciscan Father: Well, of course I make no distinction between temptation and sin. First, I think the saint struggles more and is tempted more than the nonsaint. In fact, I think you can hardly be a saint unless you are severely tempted. I would say right down to the moment——

Professor: Even St. John of the Cross is tempted right to the end? This is interesting then, because it would mark a difference between Oriental and Christian tradition.

Franciscan Father: I would say that some saints naturally, by temperament, come to a time when such things don't bother them. But that would not be God's doing; it would be due to

what I would call temperamental causes.

Professor: But at any rate, nothing really has emerged here to distinguish the Catholic and the Protestant attitude toward perfection; they seem to be the same.

Franciscan Father: This might be somewhat true, but I would say, as a Catholic, that we would allow for more of an objective or ontological change in the person, from a sinful state to a just one — more so than in Protestantism, although that may be an oversimplification.

Dr. Tillich: Yes, I think I would agree with you. The idea of infused grace has something to do with it. Calvinism is in some way in between. In Calvinism there is a continuous way up, and this has had important consequences. The Calvinist "elected" is a very dangerous type. He is the type who is aware of his own "election" and so on. He is really dangerous, because this involves a condemning attitude toward all others. And I would always prefer a Catholic saint to a "fully developed" Calvinist or Lutheran, because of the Calvinist *un*understanding harshness, and indifference. For if we are not elected, it does not matter what he does to us. This is a caricature, of course, but it is something we all have experienced. And I believe, for instance, that the South African situation is a result of the selection-election consciousness of the Dutch Calvinists who had the feeling: "God didn't bless the Negroes; we are the blessed ones; we are the elected ones. And so we have the right to rule over them." Now, these ideas operate today deep in the theological underground. But they are there and have tremendous consequences, even in their secularized form.

Professor: They remain in the subconscious?

Dr. Tillich: Yes!

More on the Uniqueness of Christ

Professor: Our fourth question reads: I have the strong impression that Dr. Tillich believes in a far more concrete Christ than his philosophy would lead us to believe. I personally cannot believe that the fervor of his preaching is based on nothing more than the Christ picture. The only case in which Jesus the Christ could be considered utterly unique is if he was what the Nicene Creed says he was, "God of God, incarnate." Otherwise, he was at most simply the best of a group of semilegendary prophets. Of course one may abandon the claim to uniqueness, but this is precisely what Dr. Tillich refuses to do.

Dr. Tillich: You say "Christ-picture." Now that term is misleading. On this subject the second volume of my *Systematic Theology* has to be read carefully. Every word

there answers questions like that. For example, what image do we have of Lincoln, who is a

symbol of the best in American life? We do have an image of him, although none of us can see him. We have several photographs, which — thank Heaven — we do not have of Jesus. But in any case, we have an image of Lincoln, or rather images. And these images stem from many sources — the writings of Mr. Sandburg and others, for example, or certain historical records or speeches.

In the same way, we receive images of Jesus as found in the Gospels, and very different images at that. Now the difference between the first three Gospels and the Fourth Gospel is so great that scholars have discounted the latter as an historical source for almost two hundred years. But this does not mean that they discount the Fourth Gospel. On the contrary, it is the Gospel in which many of the questions that arose in the early church were answered in a way that is valid for us even today. So I like to preach the words of the Fourth Gospel, but I do not imagine for one moment that the man Jesus of Nazareth could have spoken in this language, which is 100 per cent unlike the language of the first Gospels.

Among the many images of Jesus that we have, Mark gives quite a different one from Luke. And in Paul there is another. But we should not be disturbed by these differences; for they show that reality of Jesus was received and accepted historically in manifold ways.

This continued through all church history. We depend most on the first witnesses, but their accounts are so inexhaustible in depth that innumerable images kept coming up during the history of the church. And all the images point to the reality. Now we know this reality, so far as concrete traits are concerned, in no other way than through these images. If we wish to go beyond that fact, we can only say that we have — as Paul said once — a Spirit. For we do not know him any longer as flesh. We have only the image, the reflection in those who did know him. But we also have him as Spirit, which means that his spiritual presence, as it appeared in the resurrection visions, is something that transcends the historical image. These two statements I can make.

Now beyond this, we cannot look for historical support, because there is no exact historical knowledge. We can only point to the historical evidence as far as it leads us. And does not lead us very far in terms of probability, as the innumerable different images modern scholars have tried reconstruct demonstrate. This is part of the situation.

But the spiritual presence, which is not a substantial presence, is something else. And there is a uniqueness expressed in the resurrection stories. If you read my second volume carefully, you will find there many ideas on this subject that are unusual but not heretical — among them that the resurrection is the manifestation of the victory over death. Over death as the ultimate enemy, as Paul calls it. And this certainly can be experienced, and was experienced by the disciples who had left Jerusalem and escaped to Galilee, and were in absolute distress and despair amidst the ruins of their hopes. And there they had those experiences which I Corinthians 15 describes. That is for me the Easter story. But the poetic transformation of their

experience, the poetic symbolic transformation, is something that has no historical basis, but rather a high symbolic value.

Professor: Perhaps we could put his question it different way by asking, "Would you say that the uniqueness of Christ is essential to the doctrine of Christianity? If Christ is not unique, is Christianity thereby vitiated in any way?"

Dr. Tillich: Now this word "unique" is a very difficult concept; it has many meanings. First of all, every historical person is unique. Everybody in this room is unique. And one cannot be exchanged for somebody else. In Christian thought, for example, God sees us as uniquely valuable creations or potentialities, or ideas in him, in his mind, or in his being. And this uniqueness, of course, is the universal uniqueness of human beings. That is one meaning of the word. Every historical event has this unique character.

But Christianity goes beyond this and speaks of a unique relationship to God, which is expressed in different concepts and symbols. I would say perhaps that the symbol which gave Jesus his second name — Christ, "the Anointed One" — is the most important symbol. It means "he who brings the new aeon." And the symbol Son of Man is very similar; it also means the "heavenly figure" that comes down and brings, in the face of all enemies, the new empire, a new aeon. Then the "throne of God" symbol is another word for the intimate relationship, the unique relationship of undisturbed unity. And this is indeed the same idea I usually express by the statement that here is the center of history, where the highest human potentiality is fulfilled — potentialities of unbroken unity with God, and consequently of agape. Beyond this I would not go.

I would say that the protective conceptualization in the Nicene Creed was really a protection against the very dangerous theology which made him a half-god. That was really dangerous, and therefore Christianity held that he was full God and full man. This means that God’s image was not distorted in him; not merely half-true, as in all the half-gods that represent only one side of God. But the idea of a metaphysical son, or things like that — they are simply pagan incarnation ideas. All pagan gods, and also Indian gods, have incarnations. It is not peculiar to Christians. The special concept in Christianity is that a part of the divine, the heart of the divine, appeared in him. So I would say that from both sides — from God’s side his heart, namely his agape, and from man’s side his full humanity — the divine appeared in the Christ.

Full humanity implies the image of God. Only in this way can I interpret Christian symbols.

But just remember, we are not obliged to take all the conceptual ideas of a Hellenistic world as solutions now to be accepted by the Romanic and Slavic nations, and Germanic nations, and Central African nations, or by the Japanese, and so on.

Professor: You described the unique relationship of Jesus the Christ to God. Supposing it were

said that this relationship was also characteristic of the Buddhist's Buddha, or of the Christian St. John of the Cross, and others? What effect would this have upon Christianity as a religion?

Dr. Tillich: These relationships are, of course, slightly different. St. John of the Cross was dependent on Christian traditions; he was *in* the Christian tradition. He does not have the uniqueness of originality~ and that makes him different to begin with. Nobody has ever *believed in* St. John of the Cross; they have learned from him. But the power to make himself the object of faith, the representative of the divine for us — that is different. We always look through this countenance of Jesus, as he appears in the images of the New Testament, so long as we stand in a Christian relationship.

Now the uniqueness of Buddha is different. I believe that Buddha is unique, although the Indians themselves do not believe it. They are not historically minded. They only say that he is perhaps the greatest manifestation of the Buddha spirit. That is, at least, the way the Japanese Buddhists talked to me. But I would say that there is a uniqueness in Buddha; this is a unique relationship to God, the relationship of "the illuminated." The question then is to compare the value of these two unique forms. I am much more historically minded than Buddhists with whom I have talked. With respect to Buddha, there are no really significant historical conditions in our Christian sense. But we do have, in the situation of Buddha, his going out in glory very much as described in Philippians II — in "heavenly glory," though with Buddha it is "royal glory." The symbolism is very similar. And then there is Buddha going down and denying himself entrance to Nirvana for the sake of his brothers. There are other analogies. But there are also differences. Here are two really unique phenomena. And Mohammed is another. We have to evaluate each as such.

Professor: Is it possible, Dr. Tillich, to leave the historical, and to make the theoretical assumption that there could be another person in the same relationship to God as that of Jesus the Christ? If this is assumed, does it in any way affect Christianity? Or does Christianity depend upon the assumption, historical or theoretical or theological, that Jesus the Christ alone had this relationship to God?

Dr. Tillich: Jesus had a spiritual relationship to the divine which was uninterrupted, or always retained through all his temptations. I take seriously the temptations of Jesus; they are not seeming temptations. Orthodox theologians deny this, because they think that it is not possible to say a divine being on earth was seriously tempted. But if that were the case, he would not have been a human being. Anyhow I do not speak of Jesus alone. I speak of the event in which the conditions, as Paul says, were fulfilled at this moment in time. It could not happen again. It happened *then and there,* and has become the symbol of Christianity. Now the question as to whether someone else could be Jesus-like in that situation can hardly be answered. The event itself, like every event, cannot be repeated. There cannot be a repetition of the whole constellation of events involved, and there cannot be a repetition of the acceptance of him as the Messiah, because nobody would use that word today for anything. So the whole situation is a

"providential event" which, as such, is unique. Even if another Christian were to reach a relationship to God of this same intimacy and uninterruptedness, he would do so as a consequence of this earlier event. Like St. John of the Cross, he could not *be* the Messiah. For that name belongs to the event. I think it unfortunate, therefore, to deviate here from the biblical tradition, which never isolates Jesus of Nazareth from history. That is the worst sort of liberal theology.

Christianity and Western Civilization

Professor: Then you would say that Christianity is definitely historical and cannot be understood outside of the historical context.

Dr. Tillich: Oh, no. It cannot.

Professor: You just cannot talk about a theoretical Christianity?

Dr. Tillich: Christianity separated from Jesus as the Christ is an impossibility. So it is not something that can happen again and again, like the incarnation of the Buddha spirit in some forms of Buddhism. It is history as a whole that sent this Christ to us. This is the Christian historical consciousness.

Professor: So, as members of Western civilization, we cannot avoid existentially, any of us, our relationship to that event?

Dr. Tillich: No, we cannot.

Professor: Since the whole of Western civilization depends upon that event?

Dr. Tillich: Yes, although this dependence isn't necessarily an objective fact that can be observed by the historian. It is an existential dependence. In order to be actually Christian, I would say that one's relationship to this event is a presupposition. Otherwise, we could live with Christian values, but could not be called, in a true sense, Christian. I mean, we could be religious, much better even than most Christians, but that is beside the point. Because of the particular way in which the Christian community was established, nobody can be Christian in isolation from the historical event, or in isolation from the Church — or better the community (I call it the spiritual community), for outside of this we cannot be called Christian. The community is related to this one event.

You see, the whole syndrome, as one says today, is absolutely different. It is definitively an historical one. It begins, therefore, in mythological terms, with the Creation, with Paradise, with the Fall, with Noah, and proceeds to a particular historical end. It is a completely different

image of the structure of reality from what I find, in this respect, in ancient Greece or in India.

Of course, we can give up this Western imagery. But it is the one point which I would not surrender, for I believe it to be a new and decisive thing, operative behind the dynamism of the whole Western world. It is the understanding of the meaning of history, and not simply the circular, meaningless repetition of it.

Professor: Then it is impossible to escape it, since it is the situation?

Dr. Tillich: Oh, we can escape anything. We can say, "I don’t care." And many people do.

Professor: But if, nevertheless, we are still living in that situation?

Dr. Tillich: Yes, then we cannot escape historically, but we can internally; we can cut it off from our own experience.

Professor: Is one likely to find — I hate to use this word — happiness? Perhaps you can suggest a better word?

Dr. Tillich: Blessedness.

Professor: All right. Is one living in Western Society likely to find, or is it possible for such a one to find, "blessedness," as you call it, without becoming Christian in the active sense, or by attempting an identification with Islam or Zen Buddhism or other movements?

Dr. Tillich: Now this I cannot answer. By blessedness I do not mean going to Heaven or hell, or something like that. That is not the point. I mean the fulfillment of the highest human potentialities, including the relationship to God as a basis. And then I would add that probably, according to individual experience, the inner blessedness of many non-conscious Christians is much higher than that of many Christians. The decisive thing here is the desire, the inner relationship to the ultimate that baptizes you, or takes you into the spiritual community, which is universal. And through that, in any terms, we can experience fulfillment. We know this to be true of innumerable individual cases.

But here I think I am absolutely at one with the Catholic thinking people of today and the hierarchy (most of them), who know that with respect to individual salvation we ourselves cannot make any judgment. That is a matter for itself.

But if we speak in objective terms, in terms of what happened in this event which we call the basis of Christianity — not Jesus, which is perhaps Jesus as the Christ, but much more involved even than that — I would say that Christianity as an event is superior, because of certain

criteria, to the Buddha event, or to the events on which other world religions are based. And the main criterion for me is agape.

Professor: Then you would say that in a real historical sense, Christianity bears a unique relationship to Western man, but you would also say that it is possible to find fulfillment without any formal identification with Christianity.

Dr. Tillich: Oh, of course; there is no question of it.

Professor: And the Catholic position would be the same?

Franciscan Father: Yes.

Professor: Was there anything in what Dr. Tillich has said that the Catholic would not agree with?

Franciscan Father: Now there is an area that sort of fascinates me — this question of my present relationship to this Christian event — the present mystical relationship with Christ. I would say that more important to me than the historical life of Christ would be the mystical element in it. I think the Gospels speak more of that than they do of the historical life of Christ. In other words, the historical life of Christ alone is not going to save me, or faith in that. It is really the present experience of the saving power which in some way has come out of this historical event. I may be a heretic, but this is the way that I understand my Catholicism. I think this is the essence of the thing.

Dr. Tillich: You speak for myself. The "saving power" is wonderful!

NOTES:

1. Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," in H. W. Bausch, ed., *Kerygma and Myth* (London: S. P. C. K., 1954), pp. 1-44.

2. Vs. 55: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

3. An Italian monk (480?-543?), considered to be the founder of Western monasticism.