

**A Deeper Faith:  
The Thought of Paul Tillich**

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## A Deeper Faith

“. . . All the deepest, truest, alone really fruitful work and insight in these greatest things, appears as achieved in this . . . costingly wise, . . . divinely blest, thorn-crowned, ignored, defeated, yet soul-inspiring, life-creating fashion.”

Friedrich von Hugel

One of the strangest stories of man's religious quest, "The Man Who Saw Through Heaven," by Wilbur Daniel Steele, tells of what happened to the mind of a naively pious missionary, the Rev. Hubert Diana, who visited an observatory, where he was introduced for the first time to the unimaginable distances and wheeling galaxies of the universe. His simple faith unhinged, the final blow was given by the astronomer's casual suggestion that there may be more than one order of magnitude; that the opal ring on the missionary's finger may be a universe in itself, and our own universe merely an opal ring on a Finger—but Whose? The effect of this experience was catastrophic. To the dismay of his fellow missionaries, the Reverend Diana threw overboard all respectability, even decency, in a sort of intoxication of freedom from the all-too-watchful God of his fathers. Then came loneliness and fear, and he vanished into darkest Africa, where his wife sought for him. Mr. Diana was never seen again; but he left a trail behind him of clumsily modeled mud figures, formless, bestial, monstrous, each with the impression of his opal ring on its tentacle or claw-images of the Bearer of the cosmic ring.

As his pursuers drew nearer to the end of the trail where he had died exhausted, the successive clay figures became more concrete—they were turtles, birds, bulls. At the very end was the final figure, in the image of man, head bent over ring-bearing hand in an “attitude of interest centered in that bauble, intense and static, breathless and eternal all in one—penetrating to its bottom atom, to the last electron, to a hill upon it, and to a two-legged mite about to die. Marking (yes, I’ll swear to the incredible) the sparrow’s fall.”

In this world where man stands alone, questioning the universe, when the foundations of Biblical faith seem shaken by astronomical infinities, only those can help the religious seeker for God who have known both doubt and affirmation, who are unafraid to stand in thought at the boundary between philosophy and theology, history and eternity, man and God, and receive the shock of their encounter. It requires a man of exceptional courage and depth to do this, and there are many who feel that Paul Tillich is such a thinker.

Tillich has developed this courage through his own personal struggle: first, to gain independence from his father’s Lutheran authoritarianism without breaking relations with him, and second, to reconcile the valid claim both of religion and the classical humanism of his education. In autobiographical reflections written for the Library of Living Theology, he writes: “The result of this tension was either a decision against the one or the other side, or a general skepticism or a split-consciousness which drove one to attempt to overcome the conflict constructively. The latter way, the way of synthesis, was my own way.” Hence, he developed a habit of mind which finds the element of truth of two opposing viewpoints, and lets them wrestle dialectically with each other in his own mind until they bless each other. It is, to change the figure, a kind of

binocular vision which creates the dimension of depth. Such a mind is not easily understood by those who are one-dimensional, either-or followers of consistency—who repudiate secularism because they are religious, or religion because they are secularists, who deny Plato for the sake of Paul, or the reverse. To the either-or mind, the dialectical mind of a Tillich seems confused and double-dealing. But to admirers of Tillich, the either-or mind seems unbearably narrow and fanatical, and the products of its thought too much like the mythical pancake which was so thin it had only one side. Surely, the tragic and many-splendored truth can never be grasped so simply. As the scientist Niels Bohr has said: “There are the trivial truths and the great truths. The opposite of a trivial truth is plainly false. The opposite of a great truth is also true.”

Suppose, then, that Tillich were to take the Rev. Hubert Diana by the hand and explain to him his condition. “You are experiencing vividly the situation of all men,” Tillich would say. “You are feeling the weight of the anxiety of the mortal condition. You are asking the ultimate question of your own destiny and meaning; but your reason cannot supply you with the answer. You are moving from naive certainty, through doubt, to the faith that includes and overcomes doubt.”

Not all of us undergo so dramatic an experience as the fictional Mr. Diana, but most of us at some point become aware of our situation in a world we never made. Beginning with the naive wonder of the child who asks where he would be if Mama and Daddy had never met, to the old or the ill person who has fears that he may cease to be, we learn our own contingency and expendability. In the history of cultures, as in the life of the individual, there is a parting from the original tribal or family consciousness to the awareness that “I am I, standing alone, wondering how I can know other things or love other men.”

In Tillich's eyes, this is a state of separation from God, in the sense of individualization. In a universe of relationships, it is necessary for its constituent beings to be apart and relatively self-ruling as well as participants in the whole. Only after separation can there be reunion on a deeper and more mature level of relationship. Only the prodigal son can know the fullness of the father's love. Hence in the Christian view, the separation from God is as necessary to the divine love as the reunion with him. The God who is the depth of our being must become the Thou whom we encounter. Something of this truth was glimpsed by a Hindu theistic sage, Umapati, who said: "The soul is not merged in the Supreme, for if they become one, both disappear; if they remain two there is no fruition; therefore there is union and non-union." Here, too, is the note of dialectic, of balancing forces, so congenial to Tillich, like Heraclitus' creative tension of the bow and the bowstring.

But there is more to man's situation than this. Why could not Mr. Diana have found his way more easily back? Why is man a prey to fear and ignorance? Why do we hate our finitude? Why does God sometimes seem to be an Enemy rather than a Father? Why, indeed, do we become enemies to ourselves? This aspect of man's separation from God Tillich calls estrangement. It means estrangement from self as well as from God, for God is our eternal ground to which we belong and every attitude toward him is an attitude toward ourselves. Estrangement is the risk God ran in providing man with the freedom of separation. He has given us the freedom to take our share and be prodigal sons. Estrangement in theological language is "original sin"—a term unfortunately burdened with moralistic connotations.

It is no surprise to find that in Tillich's mind freedom and destiny are polar to each other. Man's freedom is not indeterminacy, and it is not the freedom of the "will" but of the whole man. By his freedom man shapes his destiny,

and his destiny shapes his freedom. You have made your past history and decisions, and they have also made you what you are. Man's separation from God is man's opportunity for freedom; his estrangement is man's responsibility, a result and a limitation of that freedom.

Such is the human situation with which Tillich's theological thought begins, and which it must explore from within; for the theologian cannot stand outside, or pretend to know all about God and to judge mankind from above. This is what is meant by "existential" theology: that the theologian also is Mr. Diana, a finite man in the dark, seeking for God with the rest of us, speaking of "revelation" not as its giver, but as its imperfect receiver. He is not the man who has all the answers, but he should be one who in his own life has been answered. And while he can point toward the answer, he knows that your answer must come to you in your situation. "There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition"—this "opening" of George Fox's strikes the truly existential note as well as pointing to what transcends existence.

From such a humble position, Tillich can tell other Dianans why we fail to find our God at once either in the whirling galaxies or in our human reason. It was the optimistic belief of some eighteenth-century thinkers that the operations of nature revealed its Maker the way the mechanism of a watch implied a watchmaker, and that it was possible to arrive at a proof for the existence of God as a conclusion from reasoning, either from the notion of cause or a perfect idea or moral law. In the nineteenth century there were idealists like Hegel who wished to prove the universe a necessary and perfect expression of the absolute. At the other extreme are some Calvinists—old and new—to whom nature appears bereft of divinity and God forever hidden from man's reason. Tillich can agree with neither; but, as usual, he can accept the spark of truth in each.

Man's reason is too broken by estrangement, Tillich believes, to reach God unaided. Consider, for instance, Mr. Diana's behavior before and after his catastrophic visit to the observatory. As a pious fundamentalist, he had grown up under an externally imposed theology and morality. He had probably never dared think for himself—his mind had worn blinkers. He possessed a vivid picture of a Jehovah as separate and as real to him as his Bible-teacher—but no more real; a set of moral absolutes of little flexibility; a distrust of his natural impulses. Afterward, in the first flush of emancipation from his tradition, when he paraded naked before his scandalized fellows on shipboard, he was testing the dubious delights of a self-made law, a repudiation of external claims. His God had been too small—and it had burst at the seams, leaving him (apparently) with nothing. Moral principles appeared to have no existence, impulses need not be controlled by reason. Such a binge results in a bad hangover; but hangovers seldom make men wiser. We oscillate between being servants and being prodigals.

Tillich has studied the course of human thought and finds everywhere chronic conflict between the legitimate demands of individuality and those of participation, whether seen as obedience vs. independence, the absolute vs. the relative, universal principle vs. concrete situation, form vs. passionate energy. Particularly important in thought as well as in politics and in religion is the conflict between external authority and self-rule. The one demands piety toward doctrine or leader or sovereign deity, the other justly revolts in the name of man as measure of all things toward free thought and self-expression. Thomas Kelly, in an article on "The Dialectic of Humanism" comes upon this same human experience: "For just when the humanist is playing the part of Jehovah ... he is pretty sure to find that humanity has, in its very depths, elements of experience which lead out . . . into a divine MORE. . . . The beyond that is within

passes over into the within that is beyond, and it must needs be brought back again. Between transcendent separation and immanent divinity religious thought is continually oscillating. To encompass the dialectic within oneself requires an effort that great souls have manfully made.” (Anglican Theological Review, 1930) Tillich feels that each polar demand finds its truth only in the depth where both are united; but reason itself cannot find an answer to these dilemmas. Certainly, the history of the Society of Friends has shown that the resolution of elderism vs. Ranterism, consistency vs. compromise, revivalism vs. rationalism comes only through the Inward Light.

All man’s philosophizing ends only in questions—forms of the ultimate question: what is the ground of our own and all being? It does no good to bring up “proofs” of God. A first cause is still only a cause: what is the ground of causality itself? A perfect Idea is still only an idea: what is the ground of essential being? A supreme Good is still only a good: what is the ground of goodness? God is not one existent being among others; he is not a non-existent being to cast into the trashcan of human illusions. Yet if he appears to recede behind the gulf fixed between created existence and eternal source of creation, he is also closer to us than breathing, for he is our ground, and his holiness can grasp us through any finite symbol. Tillich in *Reason in Religion* could well use Santayana’s words:

God has no need for natural or logical witnesses, but speaks himself within the heart, being indeed that ineffable attraction which dwells in whatever is good and beautiful.

If the moral law within and the starry heavens without cannot prove God to us, they can and do rouse in us the ultimate concern with what alone can threaten or save our being, and they can do this only by a foretaste of the

ultimate itself. “Thou couldst not seek Me, hadst thou not already found Me.” This is what the whirling galaxies did for Mr. Diana. Tillich believes with Luther as against some rigid Calvinists that the infinite can be present in the finite, that nature is the finite expression of the ground of all things. The infinite could thus grasp Mr. Diana and shake his foundations. Note that the first effect was to make him an atheist. Tillich has a high respect for the religious function of a truth-seeking atheism. He has said that the history of atheism has been the history of the overcoming of blasphemy—the blasphemy of making a dubious and finite thing of God. Through atheism, the ultimate reminds us that the name of God can symbolize only what is beyond argument, what is of unconditional concern.

Mr. Diana’s experience in the observatory was an encounter. Now every experience is an encounter of the self with the world. We are partly observers, partly participators in the world we encounter. The astronomer, in his search for knowledge, emphasized objective detachment. To him the stars were things among other things, and he was no doubt bewildered by Mr. Diana’s reaction. To Mr. Diana, however, participation was infinitely important. His own destiny was involved, and the knowledge he needed was an insight into the mind of God in its bearing on his destiny. In his state of ultimate concern, he had an encounter with the Holy—the ultimate ground experienced as the Other, as both fascinating and fear-inspiring. Such an encounter fulfils a need which no other experience can fulfil, so that we know, “It is good for us to be here”; and yet it brings the humbling awe which made Peter cry out, “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” In St. Augustine’s words, we tremble and we burn.

This encounter can come in many ways. Tillich speaks of experiencing the Holy in his father’s Gothic church, and in communion with nature. He has felt it in the beauty of

the Parthenon. He has seen it in human beings: when he met Martin Buber, he felt “the radiation of a mind ‘full of God’. . . . It was a condensed, almost substantial presence of the divine as I have seldom experienced it—at least to such a degree—among Christians.” (“Buber and Christian Thought,” in *Commentary*, 1948) The experience is real and immediate. It is no more to be doubted than is the awareness of oneself, and a faith built on its reality is founded on a rock. In the encounter the ultimacy of the experience and the ultimacy of that which is experienced are one. (Perhaps it is to such a nondualistic moment that Zen Buddhism points its silent finger.) But this treasure is poured into earthen vessels, and our understanding of it and thinking about it is always inadequate and subject to critical doubt and deep anxiety. Like Mr. Diana’s trail of abandoned clay figures, the road of humanity is strewn with discarded symbols and systems intended to portray the meaning of holiness. Beliefs perish while faith remains.

Symbols play an important role in Tillich’s thought. His use of the word “symbol” differs from that of the logician and resembles more that of a psychologist like C. G. Jung. A genuine symbol bears with it some of the power of being. We cannot consciously construct such a symbol as we do ordinary words and signs. To Mr. Diana the immensity of space powerfully symbolized the greatness of God. To everyone great spaces bring awe, even when we know better than to worship mere bigness. A hardheaded scientist, James Fisher, wrote thus of his first sight of the Grand Canyon:

The world ended; began again eight miles  
away. Between the ends of the world was a chasm.

The chasm was awful.

Awe. Time brings awe to the traveler less  
often, no doubt, as time goes on; for time gives  
him, too, the accumulated . . . experience of those

who have been before him. . . . Yet all of these were, at that first moment of shock, reduced to a whisper, whispering, ‘Yes, this is true; this is real, this is it . . .’ . . . Never had my awful friend, awe, stood so long at my elbow, so close, as by the rim of the Grand Canyon. Never will it come so close again.

*Wild America*, by Peterson and Fisher

Symbols do not live forever, but while they live they are powerful over the spirit of man. “The divinity that doth hedge a king” was for long a symbol of God’s majesty. Today we need new symbols for God—the Great Physician, perhaps. A symbol of the divine must point beyond itself, for the symbol is itself finite, while it points to the infinite and unconditioned. Hence it is always in danger of becoming an idol when men fail to look beyond it. Mr. Diana’s final figure of the ultimate in the form of a man did not literally mean that God is a man. We may pity Pope’s

Lo, the poor Indian! whose untutored mind sees  
 God in clouds or hears him in the wind.

But equally pitiable are those in a religious void for whom no natural thing is freighted with divinity:

The world is too much with us; late and soon,  
 Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:  
 Little we see in Nature that is ours . . .  
 It moves us not.—Great God! I’d rather be  
 A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn . . .

As between idolatry and the void, we must bring to every symbol the double attitude: This is not Thou, even this is Thou.

Religion lives by its symbols and can speak in no other way; but symbols are perceived by minds entangled in

estrangement, so that the symbol is allowed to usurp the place of the ultimate, to point to itself instead of beyond itself. The image of God becomes an idol, the inspired church becomes an infallible theocracy. Such symbols, in contrast to merely dead symbols, retain power—power which in itself is good until separated and perverted, when it becomes “demonic.” Men, too, made in the image of God, reject their finitude, and so their creative power becomes demonic. The power of a Hitler over the loyalty of others was demonic. Satan, the fallen angel, is the mythical symbol of perverted power. The tragedy of human sinfulness is the corruption of our virtues, not the indulgence in our vices. As Jesus saw, it was the Pharisees, not the “sinners” who manifested the results of estrangement. In political life, the corruption of virtue is apparent in the history of a movement like Communism. Originally a passion for social justice in Marx and other idealists, it becomes the possession of a party which identifies the cause of justice with its own fortunes, and truth with its own party line. Finally, political survival rather than the good of the working classes becomes the avowed goal. Religious bodies are no less liable to corruption; indeed their blasphemy is greater, for they speak in the name of God. The church tends to speak as God rather than for God, to work for the success of the hierarchy rather than the coming of the Kingdom. Attempts to establish the good society, the good way of life, the good faith, end in establishing an unfree society, a Pharisaic legalism, a tyranny over the mind of man. No wonder the free man prefers democratic pluralism, moral autonomy and a skeptical secularism.

Estrangement, encounter, religious symbolism and its history of overcoming and being overcome by estrangement: such is the complex history of Mr. Diana and of all of us, as Tillich sees it. Mr. Diana, it must be remembered, had entered the story as a confident missionary. His original

faith was doubtless authoritarian, over-literal, Pharisaical; but it had given him courage to be what he was, and to be part of the universe. This courage he lost, to be replaced by the primal anxiety of one who is threatened by the void, the chaos from which creation comes and to which created things return. He regained his courage to be when he finally arrived at his new faith in a God that accepted him into reunion. Mr. Diana's original courage came from the religious system his culture had provided him with, and this is a main task of a human culture—to embody a living religious symbolism as an answer to man's anxiety over his mortal condition. Tillich believes that religion is the substance of culture, and culture the form of religion. He has also written that "all human life can be interpreted as a continuous attempt to avoid despair." (The Courage to Be) In pagan times, the primal anxiety took the form of fear of fate and death. Iron destiny, blind chance, the ineluctable descent into the shadows of the underworld—these appeared to menace man's contingent being. Through Stoicism, man gained courage in feeling himself part of the structure of the universe. In the Middle Ages, anxiety was directed toward guilt and moral condemnation. Fear of Hell, the insufficiency of penance to preserve true peace of conscience, grew as the Middle Ages waned, and finally produced Luther, whose sense of guilt was overcome by confidence in salvation by faith, and who could say, "Sin bravely, and believe more bravely." Fear of death is endemic, fear of condemnation is still a factor in our moralistic Western civilization, and appears in Mr. Diana both in his original puritanism and in his chaotic revolt against morals; but the characteristic fear today is that of meaninglessness. "The stars,' she whispers, 'blindly run,'" wrote Tennyson. Matthew Arnold's "darkling plain, where ignorant armies clash by night," Kafka's stories of a capricious and inscrutable dream-world testify to the threat of meaning-

lessness. We are now awaiting the birth of a key symbol which will speak to the condition of our time. We are, perhaps, in the same condition as the lighthouse keeper from Maine of whom Louise Dickinson Rich tells. After twenty years alone on the stormbound ledge of Petit Manan, he went to Florida on vacation. When he was asked how he liked Florida, he gazed dourly at the crowds of tourists and replied, "Too damn lonely here in Florida." Mrs. Rich comments, "I see just what he meant. On Titm'nan he knew where he was and why. So he wasn't lonely, but only isolated. There's a difference." (*The Coast of Maine*) Today, we again need an assurance of where we are and why.

In the interplay of courage and despair can be seen not only the results of estrangement, but glimpses of the wholeness which could have been ours: a wholeness wherein every finite symbol remains united to its divine meaning, the secular united to the holy, obedience united to self-fulfillment, the eternal absolute to the historical relative, form to passion. This wholeness and unitedness with the divine ground is called by Tillich theonomy. "Theonomy does not mean the acceptance of a divine law imposed on reason by a highest authority; it means autonomous reason united with its own depth." (*Systematic Theology*, v. 1) In a word, it is sonship, not servanthood: "Then the sons are free." (Mt. 17:26) Is this only a Garden of Eden, or a Messianic Age? Its perfection is not to be achieved in time and space, but it breaks into our Now to give meaning to our lives, to our age, to history itself. It shone in Mr. Diana's face when he had completed his final image and came forth with a new freedom and a new commitment to kneel in prayer and die.

In feeling the ultimate concern, man transcends his limitations to touch the ultimate itself. God becomes manifest as Love, overcoming estrangement, transforming and illuminating the human situation. We, the returning

prodigal sons, ask to be as hired servants, but God comes out to meet us and to restore our sonship. This is revelation—not a book of infallible information about God, but an event indefinable in words, a fullness of time giving shape and direction to this or all time, showing us what a theonomous fulfillment of the age could be.

Mr. Diana had his own personal reception of revelation; but Tillich would remind us that this was not a new revelation. It was a coming home to him of the revelation which for a Christian is normative—the revelation of Jesus as the Christ.

Except that Mr. Diana had come from a Christian culture, the story of his search is like that of the religious history of mankind. Mankind, like Mr. Diana, is caught in the struggle between the pressure of holiness and the inadequacy of idols. Perhaps every idol Mr. Diana made, as every religion man has conceived, had the power to pull the soul together into wholeness for a while, but when god becomes demon, the soul is shattered and self-estranged again; its name becomes Legion, it is subject to the elemental spirits of the universe.

The revelation that says to man, “You are no longer slaves but sons, and if sons, then heirs,” must be received if it is to take transforming effect. Mankind has been prepared by “the invisible process of revelation which secretly moves through history.” (*Theologische Blätter*, 1923) But this universal principle has concrete expression in Jesus received as the Christ. This concrete revelation came to the Hebrews, who had been prepared by a loyalty, safeguarded from idolatry, to one God conceived as a person in an “I=Thou” relation to Israel, and who were in expectation of a Messiah.

Let us imagine a Mr. Diana among those who first had the opportunity of receiving the Christian revelation. He was, perhaps, an earnest Jew whose faith had been shaken

by Greek metaphysical speculation, and who had first flung aside the burden of the Law, then sought in fear and trembling to know if and how God could be mindful of him. He would stand in the multitudes gathered around a strange new teacher from Galilee who was certainly not preaching what the Pharisees preached. How could this experience be revelatory to him?

Did the “historical Jesus”—the man from Nazareth—have saving power? Not all who saw Jesus as a factual reality saw him as the Christ, just as there are doubtless tourists who chatter of inanities at the edge of the Grand Canyon. Anatole France’s story of how the aged Pontius Pilate could not recall the name of Jesus indicates how far human imperceptiveness might go. Today, Tillich reminds us, we have in the Gospels, not a factual photograph of Jesus, so to speak, but an interpretive portrait, giving an inner truth. He is now to be seen only through the eyes of those who saw him as a figure freighted with holiness. The Jesus who saves must be more than Jesus, though the factual Jesus was indispensable.

Did the teachings and authority of Jesus have saving power? It has always been easy to present the teachings of Jesus as a new and lofty ethic, a perfectionism more burdensome than the Jewish Law it was supposed to replace. “It is not too hard for thee. . . . It is in thy mouth and thy heart that thou mayest do it,” says Deuteronomy; but Jesus says, “be ye therefore perfect. . . .” For a Mr. Diana, already in revolt against the Law, already in a state of enmity toward the God whom men suppose to require endless appeasement, a vision of Jesus as another moral authority would have no reconciling power. He who saves must be more than Jesus and more than a new moral demand.

Did or does any doctrine about Jesus have saving power? Those who received the revelation found words to express their insight: they called Jesus the Christ, the

Savior, Lord, Logos. But how could teachings about Jesus, thrust upon others who had not had the encounter with the holy in Jesus, do more than impose upon the honesty of their intellect? He who saves must be more than Jesus, or new demand, or new doctrine, or new religion. "We would turn down His call with hatred if He called us to the Christian religion or to the Christian doctrines or to the Christian morals. . . . Jesus is not the creator of another religion, but the victor over religion. . . ." (*The Shaking of the Foundations*)

Jesus as the Christ can only save if he is a new reality. Tillich calls this reality the New Being. Jesus as the Christ is received as Godmanhood, man's nature as it would be if united to God instead of estranged from him, and hence transparent to God who in this New Being draws all creation to reunion. In the Christ that which conquers estranged existence makes its appearance under the conditions of existence. The Biblical picture of the Christ has "two outstanding characteristics: his maintenance of unity with God and his sacrifice of everything he could have gained for himself from this unity." (*Systematic Theology*, v. 1 ) It is natural that the hopes of a Jewish Mr. Diana might center around Jesus as a holy figure, and see him as Messiah. A Messiah is a powerful figure, and one who is acknowledged the Anointed of God might well claim power and worship for himself; but when that happens, unity with God is broken and Messiah becomes Demon. Therefore it is necessary for a symbol of Godmanhood to be self-sacrificing. Jesus as the Christ sacrificed the Jesus who was merely Jesus on the Cross, and so could be portrayed as saying, "Believe not in me, but in Him who sent me."

When a Mr. Diana asks, "How shall I be saved?" the answer is that he must be transformed from his state of estrangement. His serious concern with the question of salvation is the first step. Next comes reconciliation, overcoming man's hostility to God. Hence Jesus as the

Christ is portrayed as forgiving sinners and lifting the burden of the Law, and finally as sharing in the despair of those who are free to wreck their own natures by rejecting the God who created them. On the basis of reconciliation, reunion can take place. The man who accepts the forgiveness of God is able to forgive himself, and responds to God with love—a desire for reunion. He is also reunited with his fellowmen in the community of the reunited. Reunion means healing, physical, mental and social wholeness. Thus Jesus as the Christ is pictured as himself an undisrupted nature, and himself a healer. He shows in himself the promise of the reunion of obedience and self-rule in sonship, the universal and the concrete in personal love, form and energy in psychological wholeness. Finally, Christ as resurrected shows that through reunion with the eternal life of God, Godmanhood is not conquered by death nor alienated by the hostility of estranged creation.

The man who is saved participates in the spiritual community of those who are animated by the same Abba-crying Spirit of reunion that was in Jesus as the Christ. As the latent church, this community includes those who have felt the reality of the Christ though they have never heard his name. The explicitly Christian church is composed of those who have received the revelation of the Christ and have been united by a common body of myth and symbolism carrying the power of this revelation. These myths and symbols keep faith alive—through them the ultimate concern can grasp the faithful. “Without symbols in which the holy is experienced as present, the experience of the holy vanishes.” (*Dynamics of Faith*) These symbols need not be “churchy” ones, but they must have power.

The Mr. Diana of the story was in a deeper sense unchurched, even though he had belonged to a religious organization; yet at his death, though physically far from his fellow-believers, he was truly a member of the church

when his last prayer took the ancient Christian form: “Our Father, which art in heaven. . . .” Ironically, the African villagers overheard this as “Our Father Witch,” a good analogy for what happens to the idea of the heavenly Father among estranged men. For the church as human community is as subject to estrangement as is any other community. It tries to insist on the ultimacy of its particular symbols, or it tends to claim infallibility. Only a continuing self-correcting protest to all such claims can keep the church from becoming idolatrous: this Tillich calls the Protestant principle.

Hence the church represents but never wholly embodies the Kingdom of God. But if Tillich sees the demonic element as well as the divine in the church, he is also able to see the divine element as well as the demonic in “the world.” In *The Interpretation of History*, he wrote: “. . . The church is the perpetual guilty conscience of society, and society the perpetual guilty conscience of the church.” Tillich criticizes extreme neo-orthodoxy because it has no place for the occurrence of the infinite in the realm of the finite. He himself was a participant in a movement of “religious socialism” in Germany, and so is sympathetic with the idealist concern for the coming of the Kingdom. True to his binocular vision, Tillich refused either to exile God from the political sphere as did Barth, or to consecrate any political order as did one German theologian enthusiast for National Socialism. Here, as everywhere, Tillich stands in the boundary situation.

What, then is the relation of the Kingdom of God to temporal society? Perhaps the story of the prodigal son will best illustrate some of the basic principles of society as they appear to Tillich and the tensions among them which can only be resolved by their unity in God. The father is head of the family—here is the structure of a human community with a hierarchy of power. Each member has a

certain capacity to assert himself, and the father, because of his maturity, has a certain natural authority over his sons. Every father knows how hard it is to be powerful and use compulsion without impairing the individuality of the children he must protect by that power. Every son has known the suspicion that his father is using power on his own behalf rather than for his children, and that the family smothers rather than fosters his own powers. Thus the prodigal son asked for his inheritance and left home. The elder son did not question his father's power at that time, but felt his sense of justice offended. He demanded treatment according to an invariable principle of giving every man his due. The father's welcome to the prodigal seemed mere sentimental partiality to him. He would doubtless have approved of the stern Roman judge who sentenced his own son as harshly as any other criminal. So the father was presented not only with the dilemma between weakness and destructive coercion, but with that between rigidity and partiality.

These dilemmas of power and justice were resolved by the father through love. Love enables power to be used on behalf of reunion, and raises justice above retribution or partiality to healing forgiveness. The father was of the Kingdom, but the sons fell out of the divine unity of power and justice with love. Thus reconciliation is always at work in the midst of estrangement. The Kingdom of God is a creative and energizing process, but it is not a static perfection in a tangible Utopia. Conditions change, new conflicts arise in the living process of history. From this point of view, Tillich criticizes pacifism for assuming too easily the desirability of achieving a conflictless, untragic unity among men wherein growth is sacrificed to agreement, and too easily condemning the conflictful and tragic workings of love, power and justice in secular society. There is, to be sure, a demonic pacifism—that of avoiding

conflict or dissent so that peace is corrupted to passivity and consensus to “groupthink.” In *The Organization Man*, William H. Whyte, Jr. asks: “Must consensus per se be the overriding goal? It is the price of progress that there never can be complete consensus. All creative advances are essentially a departure from agreed-upon ways of looking at things....” Religious pacifists, who have not sought to avoid conflict and noncooperation with “the world,” can agree with Tillich that they must be prepared for it also among themselves. The family of man will always have its prodigal sons. The history of the Society of Friends, with its tensions between the unity of the Inward Light and the formalism, rationalism and moralism that have often obscured it and caused disunity, the interplay between conscience and compromise in Penn’s “holy experiment” - these would illustrate for Tillich the growth and crucifixion of the Kingdom of God, which comes not lo here! in the past, or lo there! in the future, but wears its crown of thorns among and within us now.

Here, as everywhere, Tillich’s thought is powerful in energizing the mind to wrestle in inner conversation with his views. His system has undoubted grandeur, even though it is still incomplete at important points—the nature of the Holy Spirit and the sanctification of the individual’s life. He may illuminate for you the modern situation of man in search of faith, provide insight on your own personal problems of religious belief, or, like Mr. Diana, you may be jolted out of an unexamined belief to construct a deeper faith. Let Tillich’s last word to us be this:

“To live serenely and courageously in these tensions and to discover finally their ultimate unity in the depth of our own souls and in the depth of the divine life is the task and the dignity of human thought.” (*Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality*)

## Reading Suggestions

There is much more to Tillich's system of thought than can be covered in a brief essay. Only further reading can do justice to it; but the reader will find he needs all his powers of concentration, for Tillich makes no concessions to the slower-moving mind. His style has the majestic brevity of a mathematical demonstration. Much of the essence of Tillich will be found in his *Dynamics of Faith*. From this book, the scholar may turn to the *Systematic Theology*, the skeptic to *The Courage to Be*, and the religious person to the Biblical language of his books of sermons, *The Shaking of the Foundations* and *The New Being*.

Other books by Tillich are: *The Religious Situation*, *The Interpretation of History*, *The Protestant Era*, *Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality*, and *Love, Power and Justice*.

About Tillich, the best book is *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, edited by Kegley and Bretall.