

THE CHRISTOLOGY OF PAUL TILlich: THE NEW BEING IN  
JESUS AS THE CHRIST

The appearance of Volume II of Paul Tillich's Systematic Theology subtitled Existence and the Christ (University of Chicago Press, 1957) has supplied the theological world with a fresh, highly creative, and penetratingly original Christology. In accordance with the method of correlation, Christ is presented as the theological answer to the existential question of estrangement. In his recent book of sermons, The New Being (Scribner's, 1955) Tillich sets forth the answer to the questions posed in his earlier book, The Shaking of the Foundations (Scribner's, 1958). Using these as sources we shall attempt in this paper to investigate the manner in which Tillich presents The New Being in Jesus as the Christ overcoming the predicament of estrangement which characterizes human existence.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS: THE METHOD OF CORRELATION  
AND THE EXISTENTIAL PREDICAMENT

1. Method of Correlation. Tillich begins each section of his system with an analysis of human existence and follows it with a section in which he provides theological answers to the questions posed, as for example-- Reason and Revelation, Being and God, Existence and the Christ, Life and the Spirit, History and the Kingdom of God -- the major headings of his systematic theology. The human situation cannot provide answers, it can only pose the problem or predicament to which theology supplies religious answers. Theology and philosophy both deal with the structure of reality, philosophy dealing with the problem of being "in itself" and theology with its meaning "for us." While the philosopher is able to exercise detached objectivity, the theologian is committed, involved with his whole being. The former seeks an identity between the logos of reality and the logos working in him; the latter looks "where that which concerns him ultimately is manifest . . . not the universal logos but the Logos 'who became flesh,' that is, the logos manifesting itself in a particular historical event." (ST I, p23).

2. The Existential Predicament. Existence means to "stand out," to stand out of essential being, i. e., to be estranged from one's essence. In his analysis of being in Volume I, Tillich shows that in being freedom is always in polar unity with destiny. Man's freedom, however, is finite freedom which is limited by his destiny. Only God transcends this polarity. According to Tillich the state of "dreaming innocence" precedes actual existence. It has potentiality but not actuality; it is not a perfect state but one of undecided possibilities. In the moment finite freedom becomes conscious of itself, it becomes actual. This Tillich calls "aroused freedom," illustrating it by comparing it to the development of sexual consciousness in an adolescent. The account of the Fall in Genesis three is taken by him to be a myth, not the isolated act of an individual but an act of freedom inbedded in the universal destiny of existence. Reinhold Niebuhr in his contribution to the volume The Theology of Paul Tillich edited by Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall has raised the question of whether or not Tillich makes creation coincide with the Fall, for the latter excludes the idea of a historical stage of essential goodness or Utopia before the Fall into existence (pp 216-227). This makes the fall necessary to the emergence of self-awareness and self-consciousness, through the freedom of making decisions.

The state of existence is the state of estrangement, estrangement from oneself, from other beings, and from the ground of his being (ST II, p 44). Man as he exists is not what he essentially is and ought to be. He is not a stranger to his true being, for he belongs to it, but he is "against himself." His estrangement is sin, a matter not of nature but of both personal freedom and universal destiny. The three marks of estrangement are unbelief, concupiscence and hubris (self-elevation or pride). Man is actualizing himself, turns to himself and away from God. He makes himself the center of himself and leaves his essential center. This turning toward one's self is an act of the total person. It is the "spiritual sin" from which other sins are derived.

In man's essential nature the following are united; freedom and destiny, dynamics and form, individualization and participation. These polarities, rooted in the ground of being and united in essential nature, are estranged under the forms of existence.

For Tillich the point at which estrangement between essence and existence is overcome is the New Being in Jesus as the Christ. The discussion of his Christology which follows will therefore take as its categories the concepts which he utilizes to describe this overcoming: 1) Jesus as the Christ, 2) The New Being, and 3) The Inauguration of the New Eon.

## I. JESUS AS THE CHRIST: HISTORICAL RESEARCH AND FAITH

The Paradox of Jesus as the Christ is that the man "Jesus" is called the "Christ," i.e., that essential God-Manhood has appeared within existence and has subjected itself to the conditions of existence without being conquered by them.

Jesus is the religious and theological object as the Christ and only as the Christ. And he is the Christ as the one who sacrifices what is merely 'Jesus' in him. The decisive trait in his picture is the continuous self-surrender of Jesus who is Jesus to Jesus who is the Christ. (ST I, p134).

Jesus is final revelation because he fulfills its chief criterion--negating itself without losing itself. (ST I, p133). This divine criticism of everything not divine Tillich calls the "Protestant principle." It has given Protestantism the courage to open itself to every type of criticism--even of its sacred documents. (PE, p163ff).

According to Tillich the Incarnation actually happened as a photographic event. But no one has had a purely historiographical interest in this man. The reports about Jesus of Nazareth are the reports of Jesus as the Christ, attested by persons who received him as the Christ. Thus if one attempts to discover the real Jesus behind the picture of Jesus as the Christ, he must separate the items which belong to the factual side from those which belong to the receiving side. This process yields only probable results for historical research provides only probabilities of a lower or higher degree. Thus historical research can neither give or take away the basis of the Christian faith.

In the article "A Reinterpretation of the Doctrine of the Incarnation" Tillich rejects the traditional idea of God becoming man. The Bible does not say

that God as such becomes man but that a divine being, either the heavenly man, or the pre-existent Christ, or the divine Logos, appears in the shape of a physical man or of a man in the flesh. The statement is not that God becomes man but that a divine being with human characteristics, the spiritual or heavenly man, or a moral being who chooses self-humiliation, or the creative reason or word, appears in time and space, and is subject to the law of the flesh and of sin, namely human existence. The paradox of the Incarnation is not God becomes man, but a divine being who represents God and is able to reveal him in his fullness, manifests himself in a form of existence which is in radical contradiction to his divine, spiritual, and heavenly form. It is not the unity of the infinite and the finite which constitutes the paradox of the Incarnation, but the manifestation of the original, heavenly man as the existential man, or of the universal creative reason as individual created reason, or of the spiritual pre-existent Christ as the empirical and historical Christ. ("ARDI," pp136-137).

The Incarnation is the manifestation of essential Godmanhood (an expression of the dialectical interdependence of finiteness and infinity) under the conditions of existence, in which it does not lose its essential character. According to Tillich, Paul in I Corinthians 15:45-49 presents three types of man: 1) The heavenly man who is spiritual and immortal before his coming (essential man); 2) The physical man Adam, subject to death (existential man); and 3) The Heavenly man who overcomes death (the Incarnation). ("ARDI," p 136). Tillich rejects the idea that this heavenly person is God, rather he is a divine being who resigns his divine form and power and takes the form of a servant. He believes that Paul was endeavoring to say that this man from above manifested himself after Adam's fall, an idea which did not exist in the pagan form of the myth of the "original man."

Participation, not historical argument, guarantees the reality of the event upon which Christianity rests according to Tillich. The church was born when one of his followers, Peter, was moved to say of Jesus, "Thou art the Christ." (Mark 8:29). He who overcomes existential estrangement participates in it and its self-destructive consequences, even dying. "Jesus Christ" is not an individual name but the proper name "Jesus" modified by the adjective "Christ," the anointed one. In an article entitled "Theology and Symbolism" Tillich, after defining a religious symbol as that encounter which points beyond itself to the ground of being, says that Jesus is the bearer of what in symbolic terms is called the Christ. It would be idolatrous to identify the symbol with that to which it points, the reality in which it participates.

Faith, according to Tillich, is the immediate evidence (not mediated by conclusions) of Godmanhood within the conditions of existence. Another way of stating this is that it is the appearance of essential manhood under the conditions of finitude. This picture of Jesus as the Christ which cannot be verified with certainty has power to transform those who are transformed by it. It is guaranteed not by empirical factuality but by its transforming power. The Synoptic Gospels provide the picture on which the assertion that Jesus is the Christ is based, but the entire New Testament is unanimous in its witness to Jesus as the Christ.

## II. THE NEW BEING: THE OVERCOMING OF THE CLEAVAGE BETWEEN ESSENCE AND EXISTENCE

The New Being is essential being appearing under the conditions of existence, conquering the hiatus between essence and existence. The New Being is new in so far as it is the undistorted manifestation of essential being within a personal life where the polarities of being are manifest. Jesus as the Christ is the bearer of the New Being in the totality of his being because his being is beyond the split of essential and existential being. Neither his words, deeds, nor sufferings make him the Christ. These are the expression of the New Being; it is his being which makes him the Christ. Being precedes speaking, doing, suffering. In him there are no traces of unbelief (the removal of his personal center from the divine center), nor of hubris (self elevation), nor of concupiscence (the desire to draw the whole of reality into one's self).

Jesus like every man is finite freedom, otherwise he would not be equal with mankind and could not be the "Christ." God alone is above freedom and destiny; in him alone are all the polarities eternally conquered. In Jesus they are actual. As a finite being he is subject to the contingency of everything that is not by itself but is "thrown into" existence. Finitude implies participation in man's existential predicament and subjection to error, which is evident in his ancient conception of the universe, his judgments about men, his eschatological vision and imagination. But Jesus was not guilty of unbelief, hubris, or concupiscence because he constantly surrendered himself to God, thus avoiding self-elevation. The picture of the New Being in Jesus as the Christ is the picture of

a personal life which is subjected to all the consequences of existential estrangement but wherein estrangement is conquered in himself and a permanent unity is kept with God. Into this unity he accepts the negativities without removing them. This is done by transcending them in the power of this unity. This is the New Being as it appears in the biblical picture of Jesus as the Christ. (ST II, p135).

This picture of Christ has two outstanding characteristics: his maintenance of unity with God and the sacrifice of everything he could have gained for himself from this unity. (ST I, p135). The first is the identity of essential manhood and Godmanhood and the second is the criterion for final revelation -- the power of negating itself without losing itself. (ST I, p133).

Those who participate in Christ participate in the New Being; they are "new creatures." (II Cor. 5:17). In a sermon entitled "The New Being" (NB, pp 15-24) Tillich describes the New Being under three headings-- reconciliation, reunion, and resurrection. To be reunited to God is to be reunited to the ground of being, to oneself. This is the courage to take upon oneself his anxiety in deep self acceptance. "The New Creation is healing creation because it creates reunion with oneself." (NB, p23). By resurrection Tillich means the power of the New Being to create life out of death here and now. "Where there is New Being there is creation into eternity of every moment of time." (NB, p23).

The Christological dogmas (Nicea, Chalcedon), which used philosophical concepts then prevailing (i.e., logos, etc.) tried to avoid any diminution of the human nature which would deprive Christ of his total participation in the conditions of existence and also any diminution of his divine nature which would deprive him of his total victory over existential estrangement. The static "two nature" theory must be replaced by the dynamic

theory of the New Being which does justice to both sides without undercutting either.

### III. THE INAUGURATION OF THE NEW EON

Christ is the one who brings in the new order, the new eon. In him the eschatological expectation is fulfilled in principle. He is the "center of history," the personage who supplies meaning to the otherwise meaningless historical process. Although his personal life is the criterion by which both past and future are judged, it is not an isolated life for the New Being is not restricted to his being but has "erupted" or "spilled over" upon a community which recognizes in "Jesus" the "Christ."

The new eon conquers the old situation under the law where man's essential being stood against his existence, commanding and judging it. Because his essential being is taken into his existence and actualized in it, the law ceases to be law for him. Christ has become the "end of the law." His appearance is "realized eschatology." (Dodd). There is a tension between the first and second comings of Christ which is inseparable from the Christian experience. This is the tension between the "already" and the "not yet."

The universal meaning of Jesus as the Christ is expressed in two symbols which show him as the bearer of the New Being in a special relation to existence. The first relation of Christ to existence is his subjection to it (the Cross). The second relation of Christ to existence is his conquest of it (the Resurrection). These are interdependent symbols; they cannot be separated without losing their meaning. In both cases something happened within existence. While stories of the Cross deal with the fully historical, stories of the Resurrection "spread a veil of deep mystery over the event." (ST II, p153). The Cross is a symbol based upon a fact. "It is the myth of the bearer of the new eon who suffers the death of a convict and slave under the powers of that old eon which he is to conquer." (ST II, pp 153 - 154). The same is true of the resurrection. The Crucifixion-Resurrection event is the breaking through into human consciousness and existence of the New Being in Christ. Tillich rejects the "empty tomb" report as a rationalization and the spiritualizing explanation (Paul's statement that he met Christ on the road to Damascus) as an attempt to prove general immortality of the soul after death. He regards as basic the meaning set forth in the earliest account of the resurrection (I Cor. 15) which emphasizes the religious significance of the Resurrection for the disciples in contrast to their previous state of negativity and despair. To them the Resurrection was the "restitution" of Jesus as the Christ, which is rooted in the personal unity between Jesus and God and the impact of this unity on the minds of the apostles.

Christ gave his disciples "authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every infirmity." (Matt. 10:1). Tillich sees in this a profound insight into human nature -- healing comes through wholeness, through being grasped by a power that is greater. Only a new reality can make people whole, people who hate themselves, are afraid of life, are burdened with guilt feelings, are fleeing from the threats of existence into the painful and deceptive safety of mental and bodily illness. In Christ this new reality has come upon us--our whole existence is accepted and reunited. Because this power has appeared on earth, the kingdom of God has come. Salvation is healing from estrangement. Miracles are signs pointing to the presence of the divine power in nature and history, but are in no way negations of natural laws. (NB, sermon "On Healing" pp 34-45).

Tillich's interpretation of the Atonement stresses the fact that there is no overlooking of the reality and depth of existential estrangement. (ST II, p174). God's atoning activity must involve participation in estrangement and its self-destructive consequences. The Cross is "the effective manifestation of God's taking the consequences of human guilt upon himself." (ST II, p176). Through participation in the New Being, which is the being of Jesus as the Christ, men participate in the manifestation of the atoning act of God. Regeneration becomes participation; justification becomes acceptance, and sanctification becomes transformation. (ST II, p163).

## CONCLUSIONS AND EVALUATIONS

1. Despite protestations to the contrary it is difficult to see that Tillich avoids equating the Fall with Creation. Following Anaximander and Schelling he sees the passage from an unindividuated and undifferentiated state (abyss) to an individuated and differentiated one as constituting the fall from essence to existence. This occurs at creation. Thus self-awareness and self-consciousness, acts of finite freedom, involve the creation in estrangement from his essence. Tillich attempts to avoid equating creation with the fall by means of the concept of "dreaming innocence," a superhistorical, pretemporal state of potentiality but it is difficult for this reviewer to see that he achieves his purpose. His emphasis throughout is on the fatefulness of sin rather than upon human responsibility for it. In actualizing his potential freedom, that is, in making choices and decisions, man falls.

2. Tillich's Christology is an achievement Christology. Jesus was a man who so surrendered himself to the divine, the Logos, that he achieved a complete unity with it. It was only then that he became the "Christ." The personality of Jesus is that of a man because for Tillich there is no Second Person of the Godhead to come down from Heaven. In the Godhead he sees three hypostases which he describes as "manifestations" or "faces." Disavowing the liberal emphasis on the human Jesus, he avers that Jesus in becoming the "Christ" became divine. His emphasis is not on what He is but rather on what he did--brought the New Being into existence--and on what he became--"Jesus who is the Christ." Tillich operates within the framework of a process or organismic metaphysic which is dynamic in character rather than the static substance structure of Aristotle. While he should be commended for correction of the humanizing tendency of liberalism, he falls short of the ontological Christ as set forth in the creed of Chalcedon in which the pre-existent Logos, the second person of the ontological trinity, is united with personal human nature. In the final analysis Tillich's Christology is an achievement Christology--more sophisticated than most, conceived within the framework of an architectonic structure of classic orthodoxy, and infused with Heideggerian insights into the nature of fractured human existence--but an achievement Christology nevertheless. He uses the Infra-Lutheran position that the finite is capable of the infinite to substantiate his view that the human nature of Christ is so impregnated with the divine that it can come to have the very nature of the divine. It is possible for him to hold this view because he defines God, not as the being, nor as a being among other beings, but as the ground of being.

3. Tillich views Christ as a symbol which participates in the reality to which it points but is not that reality. His concern at this point is characteristically Protestant, that is, to avoid absolutizing the finite. It is not clear now, on this basis, there was unity between Jesus and the Father, "complete transparency to the ground of being," and "fulfillment of every partial and broken appearance of essential being." Tillich

describes the result ("what") of this overcoming but does not supply the reason or cause ("how" and "why"). Despite his protestations that the New Being is an ontological reality, his Jesus is different in "degree" but not in "kind" from other men. Since he begins with a human person it is difficult to see how he can avoid making the difference one of "kind." His emphasis is always on the emerging novelty, the nexus of events, the "creative process" as over against "created goods" in the manner of Whitehead and Wieman whom he resembles in many striking ways.

4. Tillich's view that God did not become man in the Incarnation because this is a contradiction stems from his view that God is not a person, an object beside other objects, a being beside other beings, but the ground of being. God does not appear within the context of experience; he is not the object of theology. Rather the object of theology is his manifestation to us; the expression of this manifestation being the symbol Christ who points to the ground of being. To ascribe "divine" nature to Christ would put him beyond existence; to ascribe "human" nature to him is to put him below essence. Therefore his Jesus is a third person, a tertium quid, neither God nor man. This treatment of symbol is profoundly illuminating when applied to finite objects which point to the Infinite, but when employed in connection with Jesus leads to a truncated, emaciated Mediator.

5. Although he is careful to avoid extracting his theology from religious experience alone (which he accuses Schleiermacher of doing), Tillich tends to do so by making his norms empirical -- the norm of systematic theology being the New Being, the object of theology being the manifestation of God through religious symbols, the criterion for final revelation being a person who is totally transparent to the ground of being and one who sacrifices everything he could have gained for himself through this unity. Not without justification has he been classified as an "ecstatic naturalist." It is the phenomenon of New Being in which Tillich is chiefly interested, which phenomenon overcomes in principle the cleavage between essence and existence. Jesus as the Christ is important only as the symbol which points to the reality of this achievement. The Cross and the Resurrection are symbols pointing to the reality of estrangement and reconciliation and have their counterparts in our experience. The ontological and cosmic dimension of these events are of secondary importance at best. Thus Tillich can be understood as standing in line descending from Abelard, Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Wieman, etc. Rejecting the idea of substitutionary atonement, Tillich understands it as reunion or restitution. In the Cross Christ surrenders himself to God and God surrenders Himself to man. This is not satisfaction, but the overcoming of estrangement by the reuniting of the finite and the Infinite through mutual self-surrender. Killen suggests that Tillich comes close to advocating a "substitutionary repentance." (OTPT, p160). The efficacy of his death lies in the example which he gave of self-surrender to God, and it is this "transparency to the divine" that we are to follow and imitate.

6. Tillich's underlying understanding of the relation of essence to existence which is rooted in Heidegger's existenzphilosophie sounds a strange and unfamiliar note to American ears. He uses classic expressions which have undergone much elaboration and definition in strikingly new, fresh, vivid ways. Essence is the nature of a thing, the quality in which it participates, that from which a thing has fallen. Existence is its falling away from its true nature. For this reason it is wrong to speak of the "existence" of God, for God has not fallen away from His true nature. Is this the meaning of "existence" as we have come to know it? Is it in the interest of perspicuity and intelligibility to complicate an already

complex task? In spite of this, however, Tillich's system is undoubtedly the most profound, constructive, apologetic theological statement yet produced in America. Its ontological framework includes the disciplines of culture more creatively and fruitfully than any other. Its appreciation of the limits of reason in probing the ultimate mystery of human existence is significant. Its stubborn disavowal of the category of the superhistorical and intransigent insistence upon a fully historical Jesus, Incarnation, Cross are corrective of the present tendencies in neo-orthodoxy. Its failure to delineate Christ in a fully ontological sense as the second person of the Godhead, pre-existent, fully God and fully man, is, of course, inadmissible and unfortunate. It might be said that his system is long on metaphysical exactness and existential relatedness, but short on Biblical concreteness and theological precision.



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