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### Paul Tillich's Theory of Symbol

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PAUL TILLICH'S THEORY OF SYMBOL

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Systematic Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Divinity

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by .

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June 1958

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Anyone interested in contemporary American Theology must come face to face with a man by the name of Paul Tillich. Tillich is a teacher with a growing school of disciples. By the printed page and the driving lecture schedule, this man's philosophical-theological jargon is the language-pattern used in many top divinity schools in the country. T. H. Greene has said:

Paul Tillich is, I am convinced, the most enlightening and therapeutic theologian of our time. He analyzes our conscious problems and our unconscious needs more profoundly, and he shows us how these problems can be solved and these needs satisfied more constructively, than any recent or contemporary thinker.<sup>1</sup>

One prominent American magazine has termed him "the number one philosopher of Protestantism in the United States."<sup>2</sup>

The author of this paper also feels that it is important for anyone studying American theology to know the system of Paul Tillich.

Paul Tillich holds that a theological system must satisfy two basic needs: "the statement of the Christian

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<sup>1</sup>T. H. Greene, "Paul Tillich and Our Secular Culture," The Theology of Paul Tillich, edited by C. W. Kegley and R. W. Bretall (New York: Macmillan Co., 1952), p. 50.

<sup>2</sup>Time (October 20, 1952), 72.

message and the interpretation of this truth for every new generation."<sup>3</sup> Theology is not static, but dialectical. It moves between the poles of the eternal truth of its foundation and the temporal situation which cries for meaningful symbols to express this truth. The eternal truth and the symbol which expresses the truth must be in correlation. The eternal truth is given to man in the revelation encounter. The reception of the revelation in symbols is religion. The problem with which Tillich's theory of symbol deals is the fact that too often the eternal truth becomes associated with the symbols instead of these symbols pointing beyond themselves to that truth. Truth becomes a finite form; religion becomes an idolatry of littera. Tillich's system is a protest against any such finite form which gives man certainty in forms, rather than through the content.

Tillich's system is one of correlation. It is a correlation of philosophy and theology. Philosophy is given the task of asking the question which man is as an existential being. Philosophy, therefore, is constantly calling into question all former answers and restating the questions of man in new symbols which then demand the answer of theology. Theology, therefore, must direct its answers to the questions which philosophy supplies.

When philosophy asks the questions, it uses symbols.

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<sup>3</sup>Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), I, 3.

When theology answers the questions, it uses symbols. For this reason the author of this paper feels that Tillich's theory of symbol must be understood to understand his system. Paul Tillich's concept of the religious symbol is the key to unlock the complexity of his theological system. "and you cannot understand theology without understanding symbols."<sup>4</sup> "The center of my theological doctrine of knowledge is the concept of symbol. . . ." <sup>5</sup> With these statements Tillich agrees that the theory of symbol is the door into the structure of his system.

It is difficult to analyze one aspect of Tillich's structure without becoming involved in the whole. Tillich's system is a thoroughly integrated one. The author, therefore, asks patience if the reader seems to be led into rooms which seemingly have nothing to do with the theory of symbols.

We will begin this paper with an introduction into the Weltanschauung out of which the problem of symbol arises. The importance of studying the trends in the field of symbolism is not to be underestimated. In the development of modern philosophical thought the problem of symbolism has played a decisive role.

Every age has its favorite solutions to its problems. . . .

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<sup>4</sup>Paul Tillich, "Existentialist Aspects of Modern Art," Christianity and the Existentialists, edited by Carl Michalson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), p. 145.

<sup>5</sup>Paul Tillich, "Reply to Interpretation and Criticism," The Theology of Paul Tillich, p. 333.

One of the favorite answers of our age has been the Symbol. Man has, as they say, a "symbol-forming power," and it is this power which makes him a man. Consequently everything that man produces is a symbol. Symbol is the slogan, the magic key which opens all doors and answers all questions. In symbolism all our thinking comes to rest. Science is symbolical, art is symbolical, even religion is.<sup>6</sup>

As a background for Tillich's theory of symbol, Chapter III will deal with various theories of symbol in the field of psychology and sociology and philosophy which Tillich feels are inadequate. We shall classify these theories, as Tillich does, into two basic types: the negative theories and the positive theories.

The fourth chapter will constitute the body of this paper. It will deal with Tillich's theory of symbol. It will be necessary to include in this chapter a few summary statements on Tillich's "method of correlation," especially, as it has to do with the relationship between faith and reason.

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<sup>6</sup>Martin Foss, Symbol and Metaphor in Human Experience (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), p. 1.

## CHAPTER II

### THE NEW WELTANSCHAUUNG

Before we begin our consideration of Tillich's theory of symbol, we must look at the matrix which gives birth to Tillich's concern for symbology. The Weltanschauung of our age makes the symbol one door into its new horizons. Symbol, myth, and language are common topics for discussion.

One approach has been from the side of the logician. Aristotelian logic has been challenged in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by mathematical, symbolic, or more simply, general logic. Many thinkers have contributed, but Principia Mathematica by Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell is this school's Mt. Sinai. This book is concerned with the tools of analysis in logical and mathematical structures as they are applied in the physical sciences.

Another school, the logical positivists, or logical empiricists, have sought to develop a set of rules for the use of language. They attempt to do for philosophy what Principia Mathematica did for logic. Their primary concern is with language and epistemology. One of their basic assumptions is called the criterion of verifiability.

We say that a sentence is factually significant to any given person, if, and only if, he knows how to verify the proposition which it purports to express--that is, if he knows what observations would lead him under cer-



tain conditions to accept the proposition as being true, or reject it as being false.<sup>1</sup>

Carnap says that propositions are in reality predictions "which can be examined by observation."<sup>2</sup> The logical empiricist allows for mathematical and logical propositions. But these statements are really tautological in form, and, therefore, do not add to our knowledge of the sensible world.

The two types of statements, empirical and formal, or in Kantian terms, synthetic and analytic, constitute the sum total of meaningful language for logical empiricists. Any other type of statement is given to the psychologists, for they are consigned to the limbo of nonsense.

The source of these nonsense propositions is held to be the

primitive superstition that to every name a single real entity must correspond. . . . "thus" those who raise questions about Being which are based on the assumption that existence is an attribute are guilty of following grammar beyond the boundaries of sense.<sup>3</sup>

What such talk expresses is not verifiable fact but subjective feelings of a person. Its function is expressive rather than communicative, emotive rather than representational. Carnap says:

Metaphysical propositions are neither true or false, because they assert nothing, they contain neither know-

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<sup>1</sup>A. J. Ayer, Language, Truth, and Logic (New York: Dover Publications, 1946), p. 35.

<sup>2</sup>Rudolph Carnap, Philosophy and Logical Syntax (London: Kegan Paul, 1935), p. 12.

<sup>3</sup>A. J. Ayer, op. cit., pp. 42-43.

ledge nor error, they lie completely outside the field of knowledge, or theory, outside the discussion of truth or falsehood. But they are, like laughing, lyrics, and music, expressive.<sup>4</sup>

What are the implications of logical positivism for ethics and religion? According to them, some ethical statements are descriptive statements of the way human beings behave and so fall under the microscope of psychology and sociology. Ethical statements like, "Thou shall not steal" when analyzed by logical empiricism have no literal meaning. They are evocation.

In fact, we may define the meaning of the various ethical words in terms of the different feelings they are ordinarily taken to express, and also the different responses which they are calculated to provoke.<sup>5</sup>

Value judgements and ethical statements have only subjective or emotive meaning.

When we apply these criteria to religion and metaphysics, we end up with more nonsense statements. The question of the existence of God is meaningless except for a Freudian example of projection. "What is not so generally recognized is that there can be no way of proving that the existence of a god, such as the God of Christianity, is even probable."<sup>6</sup> The atheists are also guilty in their denial of the existence of God; for the whole discussion is neither true or false in any

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<sup>4</sup>Rudolph Carnap, Philosophy and Logical Syntax, pp. 28-29.

<sup>5</sup>A. J. Ayer, op. cit., p. 108.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

cognitive sense. It is simply non-sense. Religion, at most, has a subjective meaning, like pleasure or pain.

While Tillich would agree in part with the logical empiricists, e.g., the question of God's existence, he does rebel against their limiting philosophy to those propositions which can be verified in sense experience. Tillich's ontology demands that philosophy be able to describe the world of reality and its ontological presuppositions. In fact, even logical positivists have ontological presuppositions.

The question is whether the elimination of almost all traditional philosophical problems by logical positivism is a successful escape from ontology. . . . If the restriction of philosophy to the logic of the sciences is a matter of taste, it need not be taken seriously. If it is based on an analysis of the limits of human knowledge, it is based, like every epistemology, on ontological assumptions. There is always at least one problem about which logical positivism, like all semantic philosophies, must make a decision. What is the relation of signs, symbols, or logical operations to reality? <sup>7</sup>

And this is exactly what Tillich conceives philosophy to be. Ontology is not a speculative-fantastic attempt to create a world of illusion behind the real world; it is an analysis of the structure of reality as we encounter it every day. And the language we use is part of this structure of reality, for it belongs to being.

Logical positivism is idolatry of a certain set of

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<sup>7</sup>Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), I, 20.

rules which it promises to use in the world. But it ends up sharpening rules and sharpening rules and never comes into "being."

The social sciences have also become interested in language. Anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists have concerned themselves with the variety of language patterns, the Gestalt of individual cultures and the universal Gestalt. Why do we prefer a closed circle to one that is open? Why is light good and darkness evil almost as a universal rule? Sociologists are concerned with social contexts which determine language forms and religious beliefs. One need only read the volumes of studies on symbolism by the Institute for Religious and Social Studies.<sup>5</sup>

Theology is also very caught up in the problem of language. Barth begins his Dogmatik with an analysis of theological propositions and their function within the church. Bultmann struck into the heart of theology with his "de-mythologizing" of the Scriptures. He defends the use of myth, but asks that we realize and interpret these myths existentially to the modern man.

The real purpose of myth is not to present an objective picture of the world as it is, but to express man's understanding of himself in the world in which he lives. Myth should be interpreted not cosmologically, but anthropologically, or better still, existentially. . . .

Mythology is the use of imagery to express the other

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<sup>5</sup>F. Ernest Johnson, editor, Religious Symbolism (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955).

worldly in terms of this world and the divine in terms of human life, the other side in terms of this side.<sup>9</sup>

Bultmann also shows that he is a good sociologist. He points out that the world view of an individual is socially and historically determined. A world view is not true or false except in terms of that age. "no man can adopt a view of the world by his own volition--it is already determined for him by his place in history."<sup>10</sup> We should not go back to the world view of the New Testament; we should not dismiss what the New Testament says because its symbols betray an obsolete cosmological frame of reference; but we should "demythologize" the New Testament by interpreting it in symbols that modern man can understand.

This does not mean that religion should be interpreted in scientific verbiage. Religion transcends words. The reality to which it points makes myth and symbol necessary. Our task is to use meaningful symbols and to dig into these symbols to find the reality to which they point. We must remain true to the kerygma for the problems of our age are answered adequately only by the kerygma.

The challenge of a new period with its peculiar problems should force us back to the pit from whence we were digged and the rock from whence we were hewn.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," Kerygma and Myth, edited by Hans Werner Bartsch (London: S P C K, 1957), p. 10.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>11</sup>C. H. Dodd, According to the Scriptures (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 138.

The task of interpreting this message is our infinite task. Gustav Aulen says in the new edition of his dogmatics that a dogmatics is never finished. The Christian faith is unchangeable, but the task of presenting the contents of this faith in understandable fashion to our contemporaries continues to confront us.<sup>12</sup>

There is a reason for this concern about language in the various disciplines. It is not only a philosophic problem, but it is a result of a whole new Weltanschauung.

Let us look first at the cosmological setting of our basic images, or symbols; secondly, how this gives use to what Susanne K. Langer has called "philosophy in a new key"; and thirdly, how clearly the semantic implications emerge from this new Weltanschauung.

The cosmological setting of our Western world is the outcome of modern science and philosophy of science. We are aware of our movement from a variety of primitive world pictures through the well-defined Ptolemaic and Copernican systems and into our radically altered "expanding universe" picture of the present time. But this picture of relativity and quantum hypotheses cannot be painted as were the older world views. Today we use the symbolic, abstract symbols of mathematics given at Mt. Sinai in the code, Principia Mathematica. The scientist sits in his study and pictures the world in symbolic hypotheses and then waits verification of the statistical and probable kind. The hypothesis itself

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<sup>12</sup>Quoted in Lutheran World (No. 3, 1957), p. 423.

is a symbolic representation of the world as seen from a unique vantage point--a symbolic structure built up on what Eddington described as "pointer readings." "Our knowledge of objects treated in physics consists solely of readings of pointers and other indicators."<sup>13</sup>

Our knowledge of the physical universe as expressed by the scientist leads "not to a concrete reality but to a shadow world of symbols."<sup>14</sup> This honest recognition of the subjective and symbolic features of the "world Building" of contemporary science illustrates the radical nature of the changing world view through which we are passing. The Aristotelian and Newtonian cosmologies have slowly moved out to give place to the third cosmology of relativity and quanta. This is not without a cultural crisis. A new world view of science causes metaphysical anxiety. Philosophers who tend to petrify the state of physics that prevails at a given time,<sup>15</sup> and theologians who also tend to build their world views on the structure of the science of the day--e.g., O. T. three-layer world--find that the frame of their system has been replaced.

Because of the new cosmology, philosophy has had to

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<sup>13</sup>Sir Arthur S. Eddington, The Nature of the Physical World (Cambridge, England: University Press, 1928), p. 256.

<sup>14</sup>Sir Arthur S. Eddington, Science and the Unseen World (New York: Macmillan Co., 1929), p. 73.

<sup>15</sup>Philipp G. Frank, Modern Science and Its Philosophy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), p. 23.

adapt. Mrs. Langer says, "the springs of philosophical thought have run dry once more. . . and a new generative idea has dawned."<sup>16</sup> This new key in philosophy is found "in the fundamental notion of symbolization" which has become the keynote of all our present problems.<sup>17</sup>

This means that we do not all inhabit the same world. Much of our theology is still speaking within the frame of Aristotle or Newton.

The "situation" to which theology must respond is the totality of man's creative self-interpretation in a special period. Fundamentalism and orthodoxy reject this task, and, in doing so, they miss the meaning of theology.<sup>18</sup>

Fundamentalism fails to make contact with the present situation, not because it speaks from beyond every situation, but because it speaks from a situation of the past.<sup>19</sup>

What is this "situation"? "'Situation' . . . refers to the scientific and artistic, the economic, political, and ethical forms in which they express their interpretation of existence."<sup>20</sup>

We all want our neat little world with no loose ends. This is a psychological necessity. But why must we raise

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<sup>16</sup> Susanne K. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key (New York: New American Library, Sixth Printing, June, 1954), pp. 9-16.

<sup>17</sup> Susanne K. Langer, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, I, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 3-4.



the dead to save the living? Our systems should be based on our interpretation of the existing world and not on the past's picture or an appeal to the authority of a past interpretation.

The driving force in human minds is fear, which begets an imperious demand for a world-picture that fills all experience and gives each individual a definite orientation amid the terrifying forces of nature and society.<sup>21</sup>

When our master images, or basic symbols, are threatened with new perspectives which require of us courage to participate in the uncharted sea of fresh concepts and more adequate symbols, our unconscious security-demand drives us into reactionary efforts. The "neo"-movements of our day, Neo-Supernaturalism, Neo-Orthodoxy, New-Thomism, Neo-Conservatism, are all examples of the world's metaphysical anxiety. It is easy to seek the comfort of earlier formulas at the precise moment when so much is demanded of us. The life-demand is calling to construct creatively the symbolic structure of the new epoch. Theology must participate, and Tillich's system is just such an attempt.

The metaphysical anxiety of our age is the result of two things: man's estrangement from the ground of being and meaning symbolized in the myth of the Fall and the collapse of the traditional symbols which pointed beyond man's estrangement to his ultimate ground of his being.

The anxiety of man, which is a basic characteristic of

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<sup>21</sup>Susanne K. Langer, op. cit., p. 128.

Man as man, opens to creativity or to neurotic doubt. The freedom of man implies anxiety. But man must take this anxiety upon himself with courage and ask the question of existence. Too many people sacrifice the freedom they have and flee to authoritarian castles where they no longer have to ask the questions and so thereby overcome their doubt. But in so doing they no longer participate in their world-situation and give up the opportunity for creativity. This is neurotic anxiety.

Neurotic anxiety builds a narrow castle of certitude which can be defended and is defended with utmost tenacity. Man's power of asking is prevented from becoming actual in this sphere, and if there is a danger of its becoming actualized by questions asked from the outside he reacts with a fanatical rejection. However the castle of undoubted certitude is not built on the rock of reality. . . the question is in him, as it is in every man as man under the conditions of existential estrangement. But he cannot admit it because he is without the courage to take the anxiety of emptiness or doubt and meaninglessness upon himself.<sup>22</sup>

Man must participate in his situation using the symbols which are available to him. But he must not allow these symbols to become reality-itself, for we live in a world of shadows, these shadows being only symbols pointing to what really is.

We should note this transposition of logic in our time. The traditional "logic of terms," says S. K. Langer, is "really a metaphysic of meaning; the new philosophy of meaning

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<sup>22</sup>Paul Tillich, The Courage To Be (New Haven: Yale University Press, Sixth Printing, February, 1956), pp. 76-77.

is first of all a logic of terms--of signs and symbols--an analysis of the relational patterns in which 'meaning' may be sought." "The Aristotelian metaphysic of substance and attribute is a counterpart of the Aristotelian logic of subject and predicate." The new view in philosophy recognizes that "a proposition is a picture of a structure--the picture of a state of affairs," and that such a picture "is essentially a symbol, not a duplicate, of what it represents."<sup>23</sup>

The bearing of this upon the semantic problem is obvious. Symbols are culturally determined; they appear in social and individual Gestalts. In a recent volume dealing with the problem of communication, it is held that "truth" is relative to the context in which it is held; and that "context is determined by the questions which we ask of events."<sup>24</sup>

Tillich's system makes a serious attempt to live in today's world of symbols and their relationships. He develops his whole system around symbols which he feels are adequate to our given situation and are related to others according to rational rules. Theology, while it is given the answer, must also formulate the question to which the answer of God speaks.

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<sup>23</sup>Susanne K. Lenger, op. cit., pp. 54-55.

<sup>24</sup>Gregory Bateson and Jurgen Poesch, Communication, the Social Matrix of Psychiatry (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1951), p. 235.

The answers implied in the event of revelation are meaningful only in so far as they are in correlation with questions concerning the whole of our existence, with existential questions.<sup>25</sup>

Theology, when dealing with our ultimate concern, presupposes in every sentence the structure of being, its categories, laws, and concepts. Theology, therefore, cannot escape the question of being any more easily than can philosophy. . . . The theologian must take seriously the meaning of the terms he uses. They must be known to him in the whole depth and breadth of their meaning. Therefore, the systematic theologian must be a philosopher in critical understanding even if not in creative power.<sup>26</sup>

Our modern Weltanschauung has brought us face to face with the enigma of language. In philosophy, theology, sociology, psychology, suddenly, words have become the concern of the human mental-scalpel. In fact, in the discipline of philosophy--for the sake of our point--we can give the whole History of Philosophy in terms of three areas--responses, things, ideas, and words.<sup>27</sup> Every philosopher must face these three "monsters." How he deals with them places him in the corresponding slot of the History of Philosophy.

The ancient patriarchs of thought gave "things" the top spot. Things were real. Aristotle studied the cause and effect relation of things. Ideas were reflections of the real. Words were the vehicles of the real.

Descartes brought about the "Copernican revolution" in

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<sup>25</sup>Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, I, 61.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>27</sup>Notes from lecture by Professor A. Levi of Washington University.

philosophy with his cogito ergo sum. This amounts to an exchange of ideas and things for top spot. Ideas and the Mind become the real in the subjective idealism of Descartes. Even the empiricist Hume is concerned with the cause and effect of ideas in the mind. With the rise of ideas came the concern with the relation of ideas in the mind, epistemology.

Modern philosophy picks words as its tid-bit for consumption. How do words express things and ideas? The new concern brought a new logic, symbolic logic. We even have a whole school of philosophers who wear the label, "Ordinary Language Philosophers." While every philosopher must deal with all three areas, they usually pick a favorite. "Words" ride "favorite" in the modern race.

Tillich is very aware of this trend in philosophy. His system is an attempt to develop a philosophy which gives words an important and legitimate place in man's expression of his ultimate concern. The semantic problem that arises out of our cosmological and philosophic foundation is answered by a theology of symbols, pointers. "Man's ultimate concern must be expressed symbolically, because symbolic language alone is able to express the ultimate."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Paul Tillich, Dynamics of Faith (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), p. 41.

## CHAPTER III

### THEORIES OF RELIGIOUS SYMBOLISM

We begin our discussion of Tillich's theory of symbol, as he does, with an analysis of the past theories, their fortes and limitations. Tillich divides them into two basic groups: the negative theories and the positive theories.

Negative theories maintain that the symbol's actual referent is not what it consciously intended. The symbol points to a subjective state; it has no objective referent. The symbol is then the expression of a feeling--a projection from the matrix of emotion. They can be broken down into two types, psychological and sociological.

Gestalt psychology finds its place here. We owe Gestalt psychologists a great debt for their understanding of the significance of the symbolic pattern. Wertheimer, Koffka, Koehler, and their associates, contrary to the Freudian dream analysis of past repressions arising out of the psyche, opened the question of our powers of conscious observation of the real world about us. Their experiments demonstrate that perception comes to us not in bits and pieces to be fitted together like a jigsaw puzzle by some after-act of the mind, but immediately coherent, patterned, and structured. The baby looking up into his mother's face sees no discrete hair, eyes, nose, mouth, and chin, but the beloved face experienced as a whole. The image thrown on

the screen of our conscious mind does not properly represent the outside world. It appears in its entirety with all parts in approximate proportion. It is representative and symbolic. Sights and sounds are not assembled by the mind; they come put together in workable and meaningful units of experience. As such they are relative and socially determined.<sup>1</sup>

Gestalt psychology and other theories exclusify the religious symbols by setting them off as symbols which, because they have no empirical reality to which they point, must find verification other than empirical proof. They deny that the symbol had an objective referent; all it points to is a subjective state. Not the actual facts referred to in the symbol, but a subjective state is what the symbol expresses; the social Gestalt, the psychological Gestalt in which the symbol arises.

Both of these types, the psychological and the sociological, contain valuable insights. The emphasis on the psychological and social situation as decisive for the selection of symbols in all areas of life is true. They also correctly point out that religious symbols do not refer to a world of empirical objects. But here is also the danger of these negative theories for religious symbols. While religious symbols do not have an empirical reality to which

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<sup>1</sup>Edna Heidbreder, Seven Psychologies (New York: Century Company, 1933).

they point, the negative theory fails to see that these symbols do point to a reality--a reality which transcends and is independent of the subjective character of the religious individual or his social Gestalt. Their negative classification is necessary from Tillich's point of view when they state that symbols have no function other than to serve as expressions of psychological and social circumstances. They fail to point out the fact that religious symbols, while being psychological and social expressions, point beyond themselves to the ultimate reality.<sup>2</sup>

Nietzsche and Marx are examples of the negative theory of symbols. Religious symbols are considered by them to be projections of the will to power. The Church used these symbols to keep absolute authority over the people. The Church is the barbarization of Christianity. It is a "crude and boorish institution repugnant to intelligent minds"<sup>3</sup> full of mustified air, priestcraft, and creed,<sup>4</sup> and sheltering within its walls a completely ignoble species of men. The priests are responsible for keeping the herd in fetters.<sup>5</sup> The Church becomes an instrument of power in the hands of

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<sup>2</sup>Paul Tillich, "The Religious Symbol," Journal of Liberal Religion, II (1940), 16.

<sup>3</sup>Fredrick Nietzsche, "The Genealogy of Morals," The Philosophy of Nietzsche (New York: The Modern Library, 1954), p. 22.

<sup>4</sup>Fredrick Nietzsche, "Thus Spake Zarathustra," The Philosophy of Nietzsche, p. 143.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 154.



the priest. The concept of sin is even employed as a whip to keep the sinners in the Temple of Slavery, for only the Church can save man from sin. The Church is a device for controlling the masses.

Nietzsche asks the Church to question their traditional symbols and the Christian Ethic. "I bade them upset their old academic chairs, laugh at their great moralists, their saints, their poets, and their saviors."<sup>6</sup> "Altruistic morality where selfishness withers is a bad sign. The best are lacking when selfishness begins to be lacking."<sup>7</sup>

Much is now made of Nietzsche's powers as a "depth psychologist." Nietzsche recognized how small a part conscious choice and realistic thinking play in determining action. He also understood the extent to which ideological affiliations, religious as well as political, are determined by deep-lying frustrations and anxieties of which the individual is usually unaware. Nietzsche knew the mysterious ways in which emotive symbols may be employed in controlling human attitudes. He knew the innumerable masks which unreason can wear.

But neither Nietzsche nor Marx carried this theory to its logical conclusion for it is self-refuting. It commits hari-kari as do all strictly relative-subject theories.

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>7</sup>Fredrick Nietzsche, "Twilight of the Idols," The Philosophy of Nietzsche, p. 342.

To the thesis that all symbols are relative and, therefore, not objectively true, one need only apply the thesis to itself. It then becomes a projection of Nietzsche's will to power.<sup>8</sup>

The negative theory has contemporary followers, especially from the behavior-psychology school. C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards in their book, The Meaning of Meaning,<sup>9</sup> bring this theory to the fore in a more subtle form.

The Meaning of Meaning is concerned with the relation between symbol, thought, and referent. It maintains that there is no inherent connection between symbols and their referents, only an indirect connection through thought.

This avoids one of the difficulties posed by Nietzsche, namely the denial of the creative role of thought by reducing symbols to expressions of emotive and social factors. But Ogden and Richards remain followers of the negative theory when they differentiate two kinds of language. The first type is symbolic or referential language; the second is emotive language. Religious language is of this latter type and as such has no objective referent.<sup>10</sup> The symbol is a sign of an attitude, mood, or desire of the speaker.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Paul Tillich, "The Religious Symbol," Journal of Liberal Religion, pp. 16-19.

<sup>9</sup>C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, The Meaning of Meaning (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1926).

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 269-270.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 356.

Charles Morris in his volume, Signs, Language, and Behavior, carries through the behavior analysis begun by Ogden and Richards. While Morris rejects the symbolizing-emotive distinction of Ogden and Richards, he suggests that there are four modes of signifying with symbols. The four classifications are the designative, the appraisive, the prescriptive, and the formative modes.<sup>12</sup> Morris's classification of symbols is based on their function in behavior. Symbols can serve the function of informing the organism about something; they may serve the function of valuation, to aid the individual in his selection of objectives; they may serve an incitive function, to incite a particular type of response-sequence, or they may serve the function of systematizing, to organize signed behavior.<sup>13</sup>

In Morris's scheme of symbols he places religious discourse under the modes of the prescriptive and incitive. The symbols of religious language aid the individual in preferential selection. They are used primarily to incite the individual.<sup>14</sup> Prescriptive symbols prescribe or require a definite type of behavior for a given individual in a given situation.<sup>15</sup> The incitive use of symbols is to

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<sup>12</sup>Charles Morris, Signs, Language, and Behavior (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., Third Printing, 1949), p. 61.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 83-84.

persuade an individual to act in a certain way in a given situation.<sup>16</sup>

Religious discourse lays down the pattern of behavior which is to be made dominant in the total orientation of the personality and in terms of which all other behavior is to be assessed. In giving positive approval to one kind of personality rather than to others, it involves appraisors which signify the ultimate commitments (the supreme valuata) of the religion in question, but since it signifies this personality as something to be attained, its mode of signifying is prescriptive. And since its aim is to cause persons to become personalities of the kind prescribed, its aim is not merely informative or valuative but incitive.<sup>17</sup>

Tillich would agree with these four classifications, but it would be necessary to add another classification for religious symbols. We might call this fifth mode the adumbrative mode.<sup>18</sup> The adumbrative mode of signifying would include those symbols which point beyond existence to the realm of being. These are the symbols which "provide not objective knowledge, but yet a true awareness."<sup>19</sup>

The religious symbol has special character in that it points to the ultimate level of being, to ultimate reality, to being itself, to meaning itself. That which is the ground of being is the object to which the religious symbol points. . . . The ultimate transcends all levels of meaning; it is the ground of reality itself. It transcends all levels of meaning; it is the ground of meaning itself. But in order to express it, we must use the material of our daily

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 102-103.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 146-147.

<sup>18</sup>This classification was suggested to me by Doctor Huston Smith of Washington University.

<sup>19</sup>Paul Tillich, "The Religious Symbol," Journal of Liberal Religion, p. 28.

encounter.<sup>20</sup>

The negative aspects of Morris's theory become clear in his classification of religious symbols as prescriptive-  
incitative. These symbols do not attempt to refer to what is  
intended in the symbol, but to persuade the individual to  
be a certain personality by inciting a behavior-sequence.

The second type of symbol theory is termed by Tillich  
as positive theories. This type is also divided into two  
subclasses: the cultural-morphological theories and the  
critical-idealistic theories. We shall first consider the  
cultural-morphological theories.

The cultural-morphological theories of symbolism, like  
the negative theories, make the selection of symbols de-  
pendent on a subjective factor, the soul of the culture.  
They do not say that this factor is unrelated to the ob-  
jective reference of the symbol. It is the very relation  
to the objective reference that causes the subjective factor  
to be termed the "soul of the culture." The soul of the  
culture is expressed in the style of artistic creation,  
religious expressions, political ideology, and the like.  
"Style" is the key concept of the cultural-morphological  
theories as all forms of cultural life become symbolic.  
Gestalt sociology and psychology also find their place  
here.

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<sup>20</sup>Paul Tillich, "Theology and Symbolism," Religious  
Symbolism (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955), pp. 109-  
110.

The vital and the cultural are not separate from each other, but rather they constitute a unity within the creative, formative principle of culture. All cultural creations are symbols for a definite, psychic, formative principle. This symbolic character does not, however, negate its objectivity.<sup>21</sup>

Fillich claims that the cultural-morphological theories face the same difficulties as the negative theories. These theories may be interpreted as symbolic expressions of the psychological-cultural situation, for "the soul of the culture" is itself a symbol. Religious symbols are misinterpreted to be merely immediate expressions of the soul of culture. Actually, the psychological-cultural situation implies a metaphysical structure of existence. The symbol, "the soul of the culture," expresses man's relation to an unconditioned, transcendent realm. The cultural-morphological theories indicate that a science of symbols of culture should be developed from a religious point of view. This they fail to do.<sup>22</sup>

The second division of the positive theories is the critical-idealistic type of theory. Outstanding representatives of this type are Ernst Cassirer and Susanne Langer. Cassirer in his An Essay on Man distinguishes man from the animal in the way man reacts to an external stimulus. The animal reacts immediately and directly to an external stimulus. Man's reaction may take place only

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 20-21.

after a long and complicated thought process. This process between stimulus and response is what Cassirer terms the symbolizing character of man.

Between the receptor system and the effector system, which are found in all animal species, we find in man a third link which we may describe as the symbolic system.<sup>23</sup>

Animal behavior is described as sign behavior, which is primarily conditioned reflex response. But symbols properly can never be reduced to mere signs. Sign-behavior is direct response to the world of meaning. This symbolizing function of man is the differentia of homo sapiens.<sup>24</sup>

No longer in a merely physical universe, man lives in a symbolic universe. Language, myth, art, and religion are parts of this universe. They are the varied threads which weave the symbolic net, the tangled web of human experience . . . [man] has so enveloped himself in linguistic forms in artistic images, in mythical symbols or religious rites that he cannot see or know anything except by the interposition of this artificial medium. . . . Hence, instead of defining man as an animal rationale, we should define him as an animal symbolicum.<sup>25</sup>

As the symbolizing animal, man creates various "symbolic forms." These are the cultural creations of man such as language, myth, religion, art, science, and history.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Ernest Cassirer, An Essay on Man (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1944), pp. 42-43.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 43-44.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

In language, in religion, in art, in science, man can do no more than to build up his own universe--a symbolic universe that enables him to understand and interpret, to articulate and to organize, to synthesize and universalize his human experience.<sup>27</sup>

Religion is therefore only one of the cultural forms created by man in symbolizing his conception of reality. Man is forced to symbolize reality because he cannot know the thing-in-itself, noumena. Symbols express not some transcendent realm but cultural reality. If we attempt to explain religious symbols, we must study them culturally and historically. The historical study of religious symbols reveals that they are associated with myth. Therefore, mythical and religious symbols must be studied together.<sup>28</sup>

Myth is an expression of the primitive mind in which the individual, or group of individuals, attempts to express the group's conception of a particular aspect of reality. Since primitive man is not aware that he is symbolizing reality, it is an unconscious fiction.<sup>29</sup> This does not mean that myth is irrational, or even antilogical. If one accepts the premises from which myth starts, in its own autonomous realm, it has a logical and rational meaning.<sup>30</sup> But the real substratum of myth is not rational,

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 108.



but emotive. The primitive man looks in wonder at the forces of nature about him, and he interprets the world as if it were personal and expressing joy, anger, grief, etc. "The world of myth is a dramatic world."<sup>31</sup> It is in this substratum that religion also begins. Where religion begins and myth ends is not black and white. In myth there are previews to religion, and religion, even in its more advanced forms, is shot through with primitive myth, like cloves in a baked ham.<sup>32</sup>

Religion is different from myth in its approach to nature. While it shares with myth its feeling of continuity and solidarity, religion is rational in its approach. Myth is emotional. When one studies the history of religion, he sees a development from vague feelings of myth to animistic and totemic religions. These primitive religious forms give way to religions with concrete deities characterized by functions which they serve in relation to man. Soon these deities are called by name. The evolutionary peak is reached in monotheistic religion where the rational overcomes the emotive. In fact, the higher developed the religion, the more intellectual its forms until its deities become rational ideas.<sup>33</sup> In summary, religious symbols for

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

Cassirer are an attempt to rationalize man's fundamental feeling of solidarity and unity of nature and life.

Tillich sees the fundamental inadequacy of the critical-idealistic theory in that it fails to see that from the objective, empirical point of view, religious symbols are without base. They are not symbolic of any empirical, objective reference but of a transcendent realm of being.<sup>34</sup>

Susanne Langer builds on the same premise as Cassirer, namely that man's essential nature is to symbolize.

I believe there is a primary need in man, which other creatures probably do not have, and which actuates all his apparently unzoological aims, his wistful fancies, his consciousness of value, his utterly impractical enthusiasms, and his awareness of a "Beyond" filled with holiness. Despite the fact that this need gives rise to almost everything that we commonly assign to the "higher" life, it is not itself a "higher" form of some "lower" need; it is quite essential, imperious and general, and may be called "high" only in the sense that it belongs exclusively (I think) to a very complex and perhaps recent genus. It may be satisfied in crude, primitive ways or in conscious and refined ways, so it has its own hierarchy of "higher" and "lower," elementary and derivative forms.

This basic need, which certainly is obvious only in man, is the need of symbolization. The symbol-making function is one of man's primary activities, like eating, looking, or moving about. It is the fundamental process of his mind, and goes on all the time.<sup>35</sup>

Langer and Cassirer make the same distinction between sign-behavior and symbol-behavior. Sign-behavior is immediate, direct reaction to the stimulus-object. Symbol-behavior is

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<sup>34</sup>Paul Tillich, "The Religious Symbol," Journal of Liberal Religion, pp. 21-22.

<sup>35</sup>Susanne Langer, op. cit., p. 32.

that characteristic of man which operates between the stimulus-object and the response-behavior by forming objects and acting upon these conceptions. Sign-behavior has three essential parts: the subject, the sign, and the object; the symbol-behavior has four: the subject, the symbol, the conception, and the object.

Man's symbolic transformation of his world is in constant operation. But only a small part of his symbols are transformed rational thought. Many symbols simply produce fantasy, dreams, and the like. Other symbols produce cultural creations like art or science. Others build "the most typical and fundamental edifice of the human mind--religion."<sup>36</sup>

For the brain is not merely a great transmitter, a super-switchboard; it is better likened to a great transformer. The current of experience that passes through it undergoes a change of character, not through the agency of the sense by which the perception entered, but by virtue of a primary use which it made of it immediately: it is sucked into the stream of symbols which constitutes a human mind.<sup>37</sup>

Both Langer and Cassirer hold that religious symbols are simply one of the cultural creations of the human mind. But Langer maintains that religion and myth were not originally interfused. Each has its own independent origin and symbols. Religion originates in the mystic worship of life and fear of death.

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 33-34.

While religion grows from the blind worship of Life and magic "aversion" of Death to a definite totem-cult or other sacramentalism, another sort of "life-symbol" develops in its own way, starting also in quite unintentional processes, and culminating in permanent significant forms. This medium is myth. Although we generally associate mythology with religion, it really cannot be traced, like ritual, to an origin in anything like a "religious feeling," either of dread, mystic veneration, or even festal excitement. Ritual begins in motor attitudes, which, however personal, are at once externalized and so made public. Myth begins in fantasy, which may remain tacit for a long time; for the primary form of fantasy is the entirely subjective and private phenomenon of dream.<sup>38</sup>

Myth, on the other hand, begins in fantasy or dream. Religion uses empirical objects as symbols for life and death. Myth uses symbols of dream and fantasy to express fundamental truths of the universe. They are similar, however, in that they both originally symbolize the same primitive feeling. This is the feeling of awe in the presence of the cycle of life and death. Therefore the symbols of myth and religion are termed "life-symbols."<sup>39</sup>

Life-symbols are the key for understanding religious symbols. Almost any object may become a symbol for life or death. Since the symbol is regarded as the source of life and death, these objects with which creative power is associated become the primitive gods. Expression of this feeling is soon externalized through ritual.

Since the sacra are consciously regarded not as symbols of Life and Death, but as life-givers and death-

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., pp. 138-139.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp. 138-144.

dealers, they are not only revered, but also besought, trusted, feared, placated with service and sacrifice.<sup>40</sup>

Rites cannot be addressed forever to nameless symbols, and as soon as a name is given to this creative power, the name becomes a proper name for the one true God. Thus, "religion grows from the blind worship of Life and magic 'aversion' of Death to a definite totem-cult or other sacramentalism," culminating in the highest forms of ethical religions.<sup>41</sup> Religion itself is finely dissolved through a new type of symbolic transformation, into philosophy.

Religion, superstition, fantastic Biblical world-history, were not demolished by "discoveries"; they were outgrown by the European mind. Again the individual life shown in microcosm the patten of human evolution: the tendency for intellectual growth, in persons as in races, from dream like fantasy to realistic thinking . . . so long as the great Christian vision filled men's eyes and systems of ethnic symbols or great artistic ventures absorbed their minds, such facts as that wood floats on water and stones sink, . . . were just meaningless.<sup>42</sup>

Fillich has the same criticism of Langer as he does of Cassirer. The evolutionary character of myth and religion give way to philosophy which finally destroys religion. We shall see that Fillich's theory of symbol gives place for the religious symbol along side a philosophical system.

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 219.

## CHAPTER IV

### TILlich'S THEORY OF SYMBOL

"The center of my theological doctrine of knowledge is the concept of symbol. . . ." <sup>1</sup> It is, therefore, valuable for us to look into Tillich's concept of symbol.

Religion is the creation of man coming out of the matrix of ultimate concern and is the expression of man's encounter with the revelation of God.

Religion moves from man toward God, while revelation moves from God to man, and its first work is to confront man's religious aspirations. <sup>2</sup>

Religion is the culturally determined reception of revelation. Man, in his existential situation, must interpret the revelation by enclosing it in forms or symbols. Revelation cannot be communicated or received in the raw. Tillich says, "revelation must be received and the name for the reception of revelation is 'religion.'" <sup>3</sup>

Theologians often forget this distinction between revelation and religion. They forget that revelation becomes more revealing the more it speaks to man in his con-

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Tillich, "Reply to Interpretation and Criticism," The Theology of Paul Tillich, edited by G. W. Kegley and R. W. Butall (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1952), p. 333.

<sup>2</sup>Paul Tillich, Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

crete situation, to the special receptivity of his mind, to the special conditions of his society, and to the special historical period. Revelation is always particular; it is never general. When we say that revelation is general, we mean that its claim is universal. Revelation is always for an individual and for a group in a definite, concrete situation, under unique circumstances. When an individual receives revelation, he witnesses to it in terms of his individuality and, therefore, as he is culturally determined. Religion and revelation are in correlation. "The Bible is a document both of the divine self-manifestation and of the way in which human beings have received it."<sup>4</sup> In any one passage of the Bible, revelation and the reception of revelation are united; they are in correlation. Fundamentalism makes the error of overlooking the contribution of the receptive pole in the revelatory situation.

But there is no pure revelation. Wherever the divine is manifest, it is manifest in "flesh," that is, in a concrete, physical, and historical reality, as in the religious receptivity of the biblical writers. This is what biblical religion means. It is itself a highly dialectical concept.<sup>5</sup>

Biblical religion stands for two things: divine revelation and human reception. As human reception, biblical religion is part of the data of the history of religion. It is quite obvious when one studies the background to the

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

biblical writings. One can see how much the biblical writers were influenced by surrounding religions.

The ultimate concern of man down through the ages has been expressed in symbols and configurations of symbols which we call myth. The revelation of God is received via symbol and myth. These myths and symbols are the data of religion. Religion is poetry which men live by. This does not mean that religion is fiction. Aristotle has said, "Fiction is truer and more philosophical than history." But by the word fiction Aristotle is referring to the drama, poetry, and religious myths of his day. Religion seeks mythically to grasp life in its unity and wholeness. Primitive society draws a sharp line between fairy tales and myth.<sup>6</sup> Myth involves the emotion of sacredness or holiness, and, far from being escape, it is a serious attempt to depict ultimately important facts in the real world. Its aim is moral orientation, not escape.<sup>7</sup> Myths are expressed by participants fully and desperately involved in the enterprise of life and seeking for light and power. Myth is in essence man's attempt to answer the question of meaning. It differs from poetry precisely in its reference to ultimate meaning, and it aims to orientate men to that meaning. But while the object of myth is

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<sup>6</sup>B. Malinowski, The Foundations of Faith and Morals (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), pp. 12ff.

<sup>7</sup>Susanne K. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key (New York: New American Library, 1948), p. 143.



transcendent, its language, like that of poetry, is derived from the concrete objects of human experience. Because the meaning of life is no conclusion to a series of propositions in the form of a syllogism, but a sentiment and intuition from the depths of man's concern, myth shares the emotional and intuitive characteristics of poetry.

We must take myth seriously, but not literally. The fundamentalist goes to the ridiculous extreme of taking myth literally, therefore, treating it as a science; the modern critic often regards it as a prescientific illusion, thus failing to take it seriously. Against both these views Tillich argues for myth as a poetic depiction of ultimate meaning.

Tillich, along with such notables as Reinhold Niebuhr and S. Langer, feels that the distinctive activity of the human mind is that transformation by which the infinite variety of reality is expressed in and by the symbols of the mind. At the human level symbolic activity becomes a fundamental need as well as a sheer human delight. Man feels driven to express his ultimate concern in words. This process is that by which God's revelation is clothed in language. "Man's ultimate concern must be expressed symbolically, because symbolic language alone is able to express the ultimate."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Paul Tillich, Dynamics of Faith (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), p. 41.

We must keep religion and revelation distinct, and yet they must be in correlation. We do not have religion without revelation; we do not have revelation without religion.

Revelation for Tillich is God's self-manifestation to man. This manifestation is through existentialist encounter and it is immediate. God is presented to us under two aspects. First of all, God ontologically is the ground of being, the prius of all thought and reality, the unconditioned "no-thing" to which all things must be referred. Concerning this God we can think and express ourselves only symbolically, for human conceptions are utterly inept to deal with this primal matrix of reality. Concepts can and must be used in the "method of correlation."<sup>9</sup>

The thesis of Paul Tillich's theory of the religious symbol is as follows: When man expresses himself religiously, he expresses himself symbolically.

Religion means being ultimately concerned, asking the question of "to be or not to be" with respect to the meaning of one's existence, and having symbols in which this question is answered.<sup>10</sup>

The above definition of religion is inclusive; it is the basic concept of religion. Religion in the narrower sense is

religion as having a set of symbols, normally of divine beings or a divine being, having symbolic statements about activities of these gods or this god, having ritual activities and doctrinal formulations about their relationship to us. This is religion in the narrower sense, where religion is identified first of all as a belief in the exis-

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<sup>9</sup>Gustave Weigel, "The Theological Significance of Paul Tillich," Cross Currents (Spring, 1956), 142.

<sup>10</sup>Paul Tillich, "Existentialist Aspects of Modern Art," Christianity and the Existentialists, edited by Carl Michalson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), p. 132.

tence of a God, and then with intellectual and practical activities following out of this belief.<sup>11</sup>

Theology concerns itself with symbols, for "The language of faith is the language of symbols."<sup>12</sup> Theology, taken in its broadest sense, is "the logos or the reasoning about theos (God and divine things)."<sup>13</sup> This means that reasoning is involved in man's religious formation. "Man would not be spiritual without words, thoughts, concepts."<sup>14</sup> The fact that we use symbols to express our ultimate concern does not mean that we do not use our reason. For reason has the quality of grasping reality and enclosing it in language. Even a myth contains a theological thought which can be made explicit. Mystical speculation, as in Vedanta Hinduism, correlates meditative elevation with theological penetration. Metaphysical speculations, as in Greek philosophy, unite the rational with theological vision. This is all "theo-logy," being a rational interpretation of the religious substance of rites, symbols, and myth.

Theology must have a rational character, for it is reasoning about God. Rational character consists of three aspects. It must first of all possess semantic rationality.

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 132-133.

<sup>12</sup>Paul Tillich, Dynamics of Faith, p. 45.

<sup>13</sup>Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), I, 15.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

This means that theology must exercise care in its choice and use of words. Certain terms which theology uses are carry-overs from philosophy, science, and popular language. If the theologian uses these words, he can assume that the content indicates the realm of discourse out of which the term was born. But this is not always the case. Some terms which theology uses are at the same time used in other ways with other content by other disciplines. The principle of semantic rationality does not demand that these extra-theological connotations be excluded; but it does demand that theology clarify its use of these symbols by exclusion and inclusion, thereby defining their meaning. Secondly, theological thinking must possess logical rationality. This means that theology must be subject "to the structures which determine any meaningful discourse and which are formulated in the discipline of logic."<sup>15</sup> Thirdly, theology must have methodological rationality. This means that it must follow a definite way of deriving and stating its proposition. The method may depend on many non-rational factors, but once it is established, it must be carried through rationally and consistently.<sup>16</sup>

The final expression of consistency, applying methodological rationality, is the theological system. "It is the function of the systematic form to guarantee the consistency of

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 53-59.

cognitive assertions in all realms of methodological knowledge."<sup>17</sup>

The method Tillich employs in developing his system is called "the method of correlation." This correlation is between religious symbols and that which is symbolized by them. In other words, there is a correlation between man's ultimate concern and that about which he is ultimately concerned. The second meaning of correlation determines the statements about God and the world, the correlation of the infinite and the finite. The third meaning is in the divine-human relationship.

In this method the theologian analyzes the existential situation, discovers the questions which arise out of this matrix, and demonstrates that the symbols used in the Christian message are the answers to these questions. There is a correlation of question and answer.

Now the questions which man asks about himself are the same in every age, but they take different forms. They are culturally determined. Philosophy is given the first task. It takes existence into the hands of reason and empirical research and tears it into questions using the language of its discipline and situation. These questions are hewn out of the quarry of life, and like Adam, wait for the breath of God's revelation. The question-form is relative and can be found in contemporary art, politics, philosophy, ethics,

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

etc.; but the question-content is absolute. The answer of God given to man in symbol and myth grasps him from beyond himself in such a fashion that the whole meaning of his existence consists in responding to the object. Now the object is not God, but the symbol of God given to man by grace. Religion is not so much something men do, as it is something which happens to them and to which they respond. The symbols of religion are never invented or contrived by man; rather, they happen as man seeks to respond to the reality on which he is dependent. They are the creation of the encounter of man and "being-itself."<sup>18</sup> God is not the object of theology; he is the indirect object through symbols which are the direct object.

the direct object of theology is His manifestation to us, and the expression of this manifestation is the religious symbol. This is the basic relation between theology and symbolism. The object of theology is found in the symbols of religious experience. They are not God, but they point to God. God may be said to be the object of theology but only indirectly. The direct object of theology is found only in religious symbols.<sup>19</sup>

Symbols are the form of theology; "Being-itself" is the content of theology. The symbols with which theology deals are relative, but that to which these symbols point is absolute.

Where is God? Where can we find the being that is the

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<sup>18</sup> Paul Tillich, "Theology and Symbolism," Religious Symbolism, edited by F. Ernest Johnson (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955), p. 108.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

material for theological thought? It first must be stated in contrast to everything else that God is not given. He is not something which we find in the context of reality. God is not a being which appears as "an object beside other objects." It is just simply impossible to give a conceptual explanation of God. In fact, it is His very nature as God which makes Him transcendent to any such possibility. "God transcends His own name."<sup>20</sup>

But we must speak of God. God is the symbol, the fundamental symbol, of our ultimate concern. He is present in every act of faith, even if it is a denial of God. If one denies that God is his ultimate concern, this is ultimate concern; therefore, his ultimate concern affirms his faith in ultimate concern. Atheism is not the denial of God; it is indifference to the ultimate question.

In any case, he who denies God as a matter of ultimate concern, affirms God, because he confirms ultimacy in his concern. God is the fundamental symbol for what concerns us ultimately.<sup>21</sup>

It would seem that the conclusion to this paragraph is that God is nothing but a symbol. A symbol for what? The answer is for God. "God is the symbol for God." This means that we must distinguish two elements in our conception of God. The element of ultimacy is a matter of immediate experience and is not symbolic in itself, but the element of

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<sup>20</sup>Paul Tillich, Dynamics of Faith, pp. 44-45.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

concreteness must be taken from our ordinary experience and pointed symbolically to God. The man who worships Jahweh has the element of ultimate concern and the element of concreteness--a concrete image of what concerns him ultimately.<sup>22</sup>

This makes the question of God's existence meaningless. "It is meaningless to question the ultimacy of an ultimate concern." The question is not the existence of God, but "which of the innumerable symbols of faith is most adequate to the meaning of faith?"<sup>23</sup>

The truth of a symbol is determined from two sides, the subjective and the objective. From the subjective side a symbol of faith is true if it adequately expresses an ultimate concern. By this, Tillich acknowledges the truth in all genuine symbols and makes the history of religion the history of man's ultimate concern. The objective side says that a symbol is true if its content is the really ultimate. The objective side is the criterion of ultimacy by which the history of religion is judged in terms of a yes and no. Every type of faith has the tendency to make symbols ultimate instead of pointing to the ultimate. The truth of faith, therefore, implies an element of self-negation. This means that the symbol is most adequate when it expresses not only the ultimate, but also its own lack

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 46-47.



of ultimacy.

This is the genius of the protestant principle, for it not only makes its symbols point to the ultimate, but includes a denial that the symbols are ultimate. In this way it stands in judgement upon itself. If a symbol ceases to express adequately the ultimate, it is declared dead, and a reformation is called for. The symbol has lost its truth, for it no longer points to the ultimate. The other side of the protestant principle stands in judgment over any authoritarian declaration that a symbol is ultimate and not that it is a pointer to the ultimate.<sup>24</sup>

In these symbols there is clothed that which is the content of every religion, the basis of every religious experience, and the under-structure of every theology, namely, the divine-human encounter. Theology has the task of conceptual interpretation, explanation, and criticism of the symbols in which a unique encounter between God and man has found expression.

What is a symbol? The first characteristic of a symbol is that it points beyond itself, but so does a sign. Symbols are distinguished from signs in that they participate in the power of that which it symbolizes.

The symbol opens up a level of meaning which otherwise is closed. It opens up a stratum of reality, of meaning and being which otherwise we could not reach; and in doing so, it participates in that which it opens.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 96-98.

<sup>25</sup>Paul Tillich, "Theology and Symbolism," Religious Symbolism, p. 109.

The second characteristic is therefore that a symbol participates in that which it symbolizes. "Decisive is the fact that signs do not participate in the reality of that to which they point, while symbols do."<sup>26</sup> The flag of the United States is an example of a symbol. "The flag participates in the power and dignity of the nation for which it stands."<sup>27</sup> An attack upon the flag is an attack upon the group in which it is acknowledged. Such an attack is rebellion. The word Jahweh is a symbol which points to the ultimate reality, coming out of the ultimate concern of the Jewish community. Any misuse of this symbol is abusing the reality to which this symbol points. It is blasphemy.

We also said that a symbol opens to us a new level of meaning and being. This is the double edge of symbolic language. The symbol points to a new level of being, but in doing so opens up a corresponding stratum of the mind, which we call meaning. "Symbols open up, so to speak, in two directions--in the direction of reality and in the direction of the mind."<sup>28</sup> This is the third characteristic of a symbol, namely, that it opens up levels of reality which otherwise are closed to us. Works of art and drama

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<sup>26</sup>Paul Tillich, Dynamics of Faith, p. 42.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>28</sup>Paul Tillich, "Theology and Symbolism," Religious Symbolism, p. 109.

would be examples. "A picture and a poem reveal elements of reality which cannot be approached scientifically."<sup>29</sup>

A symbol unlocks dimensions and elements of our soul which correspond to the dimensions and elements of reality. A picture, for example,

points to a reality and a meaning, to a level of reality which the painter in his creative encounter reveals to us. Now we see it; now we can be in it.<sup>30</sup>

There are within us dimensions of which we cannot become aware except through such symbols, which are born out of man's encounter with reality.

The fourth characteristic of symbols is that " they cannot be produced intentionally."<sup>31</sup> Symbols grow out of the matrix of the individual or the collective unconsciousness and cannot become functional without being accepted by the unconscious dimension of our being.

Symbols cannot be invented. They are like human beings which live and die. They are born in the womb of existence, conceived by the intercourse of man and God. They grow when the situation is ripe; they die when that situation changes. They die because they no longer express the ultimate concern and the response to this concern in the group or in the individual where they originally found

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<sup>29</sup>Paul Tillich, Dynamics of Faith, p. 42.

<sup>30</sup>Paul Tillich, "Theology and Symbolism," Religious Symbolism, p. 109.

<sup>31</sup>Paul Tillich, Dynamics of Faith, p. 43.

expression. Take the symbol sin. It is no longer a completely adequate symbol. The situation is ready for a new symbol for the reality to which sin pointed. The new symbol is "estrangement."

We have discussed the characteristics of symbols in general; now we will look at religious symbols. The ultimate concern of man transcends any finite reality. This ultimate concern is being itself, ultimate reality, meaning itself. But the ultimate uses a piece of finite reality to express itself. Therefore, no finite reality can express it directly and properly. Religiously speaking, God transcends His own name. The ultimate transcends all levels of reality; it is the ground of reality itself. It transcends all levels of meaning; it is the ground of meaning itself. But in order to express it, we must use the material of our daily encounter. All realms of being have contributed to religious symbolism. Theology can never produce nor destroy religious symbols. They are that which is given to theology. God is not that which is given, but the symbols of the encounter between God and man.

Tillich distinguishes three levels of religious symbols: transcendental, sacramental, and liturgical. The transcendental level of symbols points to the holy. On this level theology must function to resist the idolatrous identification of the ground of our being and meaning with the God of ordinary theism. Such a God is a being existing with other beings. The God of traditional theism is really

a symbol for the God beyond the God of theism. The real God is beyond the symbolic material in which we clothe Him, and yet we can only speak of Him with symbolic material which points to Him.

The God Who is really God is the abyss of the symbolic material which we apply to Him. On the other hand, we can speak of Him only if we apply this symbolic material to Him.<sup>32</sup>

Classical theology realized this nature of symbolic language. It knew that if we said anything about God, we must doubt it in the next moment. We must say yes and no. This gives theology its dialectical nature.

The second level of religious symbols is called by Tillich the sacramental level. This means that the holy appears in time and space, in everyday realities. Events, finite things, historical persons can have a sacramental power. The danger at this level is the inclination to identify the bearer of the holy with the holy itself. When this is done, religion becomes magic. Jesus is a bearer of the holy in the Church's confession to Him as the Christ. But any confusion of Him as the holy itself instead of the bearer of the holy makes religion a distortion. We then have, not Christianity, but Jesus religion.<sup>33</sup>

The third level is termed by Paul Tillich as the liturgical level. He includes special objects, special ges-

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<sup>32</sup>Paul Tillich, "Theology and Symbolism," Religious Symbolism, p. 114.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 114-115.

tures, special garb, and all the sign-symbols which are elevated to give symbolic power. They are really signs and not symbols, but the tradition of the Church has elevated them to give a symbolic meaning, and yet, they are not genuine symbols. They are a mixture of symbol and sign. Theology must be careful so to designate them.<sup>34</sup>

Tillich distinguishes between two types of myth: the "unbroken" and the "broken." In the unbroken myth, we have religious, scientific, and mythical elements woven together. The religious element is the relatedness to being-itself. The scientific element is the relatedness to empirical reality. The mythical element is the objectification of being-itself through the medium of intuitions and conceptions and pieces of empirical reality. In the unbroken myth, the religious and scientific elements are not recognized and developed. The mythical conceptions are accepted as explaining reality as a whole. The myth of the Creation Story would be such an example. Inevitably, however, the religious and the scientific elements develop, and threaten to destroy the myth. This produces the broken myth. Religion uses mythical conceptions symbolically to make transcendent reality perceptible. The mythical conceptions do not retain their literal meaning, but they point beyond themselves to being-itself.

A myth which is understood as a myth, but not removed

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

or destroyed is a broken myth. Christianity denies by its very nature any unbroken myth, because of its affirmation in the First Commandment: the affirmation of the ultimate as ultimate and the rejection of any kind of idolatry, including verbalizations of God. All mythological elements in the Bible, and doctrine and liturgy should be recognized as such, but they should be held in their symbolic form and not replaced by scientific substitutes. For there is no substitute for the use of symbols and myth. They are the language of faith. The primitive consciousness resists the attempt to interpret the myth of myths. It is afraid to demythologize. It believes that a broken myth loses its truth and no longer can convince us of its truth. Those who live in a nondemythologized world feel safe in their concocted ivory castle. They resist fanatically any attempt to question or raise any doubts concerning the foundation of myth upon which they build their security. Breaking the myth by making conscious its symbolic character would destroy their idols. Such resistance is supported by institutionalized systems, religious or political, which feel that they live or die by the literalism of their conceptions.<sup>35</sup>

The resistance against demythologization expresses itself in "literalism." The symbols and myths are understood in their immediate meaning. The material, taken from nature and history, is used in its proper sense. The character of the symbol to point beyond

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<sup>35</sup>Paul Tillich, "The Religious Symbol," Journal of Liberal Religion, pp. 23-25.

itself to something else is disregarded.<sup>36</sup>

Literalism makes creation a once-upon-a-time magical act. The myth of the Fall is localized geographically and individually. The virgin birth of the Christ is understood biologically. The resurrection and ascension of Christ are taken as physical events.

The presupposition of such literalism is that God is a being, acting in time and space, dwelling in a special place, affecting the course of events and being affected by them like any other being in the universe.<sup>37</sup>

Such literalism makes God a being beside other beings. Religiously speaking, it deprives Him of His majesty, unconditionality, and ultimacy. When such faith takes symbols literally it places its faith in finite conceptions and so is idolatrous. Faith which is conscious of broken myth gives God the honor which is due Him, namely, His ultimate and unconditioned nature.

We can distinguish two types of literalism, the natural and the reactive. The natural stage of literalism is that in which the mythical and the literal are not distinguishable. The primitive period in the history of any group consists in its inability to separate fact from myth. This stage has a right of its own, but when individuals begin to question the myths then two reactions are possible. One can replace the unbroken myth by the broken myth, namely,

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<sup>36</sup>Paul Tillich, Dynamics of Faith, p. 51.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 52.



to see its symbolic nature. But many prefer to repress their questions and so to dodge the uncertainty which they feel appears in the breaking of the myth. This is generally done unconsciously. But the second stage of literalism is conscious. The tool by which the questions are repressed is termed "heteronomy" which means an authority which stands above question. One gives his unconditional surrender to the Bible. The Bible becomes a god.

Such idolatry is unjustifiable if a mature person is broken in his personal center by the repression of an aggression toward the questions which have become conscious in his mind. He becomes a spiritual neurotic.

Neurotic anxiety builds a narrow castle of certitude which can be defended and is defended with the utmost tenacity. . . . However the castle of undoubted certitude is not built on the rock of reality. . . . The question is in him, as it is in every man as man under the conditions of existential estrangement. But he cannot admit it because he is without the courage to take the anxiety of emptiness or doubt and meaninglessness upon himself.<sup>38</sup>

The task of theology is to conceptualize, to explain, and to criticize these symbols. "Conceptualization discloses the relation of symbols to each other and to the whole to which they belong."<sup>39</sup> It is systematizing.

The second function of theology is explanation. It is giving the religious meaning or the application. It is homiletics. "It means an attempt to make understandable

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<sup>38</sup>Paul Tillich, The Courage To Be, pp. 76-77.

<sup>39</sup>Paul Tillich, "Theology and Symbolism," Religious Symbolism, p. 111.

the relation of the symbols used to that to which they point."<sup>40</sup>

The third function of theology is criticism. Criticizing does not mean to destroy symbols using the criteria of philosophy, or psychology, therefore, calling them true or false. This would mean criticizing symbols on a non-symbolic level. Symbols must be criticized on a symbolic level of meaning. "If a symbol is criticized, it must be criticized within the bounds of symbolic meaning."<sup>41</sup> Symbols must be criticized as to their adequacy in answering the questions of man. One of the problems of our age is the literal acceptance of the symbols of scripture. If they are literal, then they are open to attack by the rules of scientific inquiry. On these grounds they are easily declared ridiculous. Symbols are not literal accounts, for they symbolize that which cannot be contained in litera. They must be judged as to their adequacy in expressing the ultimate concern of man in question and meaning.

Theological criticism functions in three ways. First, it protects symbols as symbols. It states that symbols cannot be reduced to the level of non-symbolic thinking. Secondly, theology shows that some symbols are more adequate than others. Thirdly, it shows that some symbols are inadequate in the light of the totality of symbolic mean-

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 113.

ing. Some symbols contradict the basis of symbolic structure.<sup>42</sup>

Tillich is not advocating the destruction of symbols. The ultimate concern of man must be expressed in symbols. What he does try to show is that religion is the symbolic expression of man's encounter with the ultimate reality. Our problem as theologians is to make sure that the symbols we use are adequate and come out of the matrix of our concrete situation. Our Age is a question mark. Men are crying for meaningful symbols. The symbols which we have are in an ethnic fight in a shrinking world. Theology must "put up or shut up." Those symbols which no longer speak to man must be dropped.

For Tillich there is no conflict between faith and reason, at least if you define them as he does. Faith "is the state of being ultimately concerned."<sup>43</sup> Man's ultimate concern must be expressed in symbols, for only symbols are able to express the ultimate.<sup>44</sup>

Reason is "the meaningful structure of mind and reality."<sup>45</sup> Therefore reason is the precondition of faith. Faith is the act in which reason reaches beyond itself.

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>43</sup>Paul Tillich, Dynamics of Faith, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

Man's reason is finite and moves within finite relations. But reason is not bound to its own finitude. "It is aware of it, in so doing, rises above it."<sup>46</sup> If reason is grasped by an ultimate concern, it is driven beyond itself. But this does not mean that reason has been destroyed or superseded. "The ecstatic experience of an ultimate concern does not destroy the structure of reason." This ecstasy fulfills reason by its experiencing the presence of the ultimate. If reason is not in correlation with this faith in the ultimate, it grasps the finite and so becomes demonic. Reason is the presupposition of faith but faith fulfills reason.

Faith as a state of ultimate concern is reason in ecstasy. There is no conflict between the nature of faith and the nature of reason; they are within each other.<sup>47</sup>

The conflict between faith and reason arises under the conditions of existence. Man's reason, essentially, has a "grasping" and a "shaping" character.

The mind receives and reacts. In receiving reasonably, the mind grasps its world; in reacting reasonably, the mind shapes its world. "Grasping," in this context, has the connotation of penetrating into the depth, into the essential nature of a thing or an event, of understanding and expressing it. "Shaping," in this context, has the connotation of transforming a given material into a Gestalt, a living structure which has the power of being.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, I, 76.

Now if man could employ reason, as reason is essentially, he could understand and grasp his world. But the myth of the Fall points to the fact that man is in existence and, therefore, so is his reason. Reason in its existential situation does not disclose reality as it actually is. It presents life as finite, self-contradictory, and ambiguous. The awareness of man's state is called by Tillich the "depth of reason." The depth of reason is the expression of something that is not reason, for it precedes it and is manifest through it. It is hidden in reason under the conditions of existence. Because of these conditions, reason in existence expresses itself in myth, as well as in its proper functions. The very fact that reason expresses itself in myth points to its "fallen" state and to the fact that it has lost its unity with its depth which could grasp reality. Myth, therefore, is to be considered an expression of the depth of reason. There is no conflict between myth and reason, for myth points to the depth of reason. This very fact that reason cannot express its own depth except in myth makes revelation necessary. The revelation of the depth of reason comes in the form of myth or symbol. "Revelation does not destroy reason, but reason raises the question of revelation."<sup>49</sup>

Because theology deals with the ultimate concern of

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

man, being-itself, it must use symbol and myth, for reason is in a "fallen" state. This does not mean that theology contradicts reason; its task is the fulfillment of the questions which reason asks but cannot answer. Theology is, therefore, a rational interpretation of reality through the forms of myth and symbol.

Christian theology makes the claim that it is the theology by the fact that the Logos became flesh; that in the event "Jesus as the Christ" essential reason has become manifest under the conditions of existence.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

In this paper we have seen how the change in logic from Aristotelian subject-object to modern symbolic logic has caused science to picture the world in symbols and "pointers." Psychology, sociology and philosophy have adapted to this new world view by making a careful analysis of the words and symbols which they use. The semantic problem is the problem of our age. Theology must and is facing this problem. Tillich, Bultmann, Barth, Dodd, to name a few, are calling for a new awareness of words, myth, and symbols in theological talk.

In chapter three we examined those theories which Tillich feels are inadequate for the theological discipline. He finds that the positive and the negative theories of symbol do not allow for a transcendent reality. They make religious symbols projections of the subjective nature of the individual, or the "soul of the culture."

Chapter four gave exposition to Tillich's theory of symbol which is based upon a transcendental realism. Are symbols only projections of subjective states? Do they point to any reality? What validity is given to religious language? Tillich's theory of symbol is an attempt of a theologian and a philosopher to defend religious language as necessary and valid in that it points to the ultimate concern of man. Freud, in opposition, has said, "Religion, like neurosis, is

a flight from painful reality into an illusory world system."<sup>1</sup>

A neurotic fantasy (or religious doctrine) does not give an accurate report or interpretation of events happening in the real world. It is only a symptom or expression of certain subjective, psychological processes which in turn, are caused by certain events that took place in the past. Thus a dream-structure or a religious system gives us "real information" only about the past experiences of the person who has the fantasy.<sup>2</sup>

This is the issue to which Tillich speaks with his transcendent realism.

Tillich's theory of symbol is an attempt to give the ontological and the structural relationship of words to the Real. Religious words are not a "flight into a world of illusion," but they are "pointers" to the really real. There is a reality which transcends existential reality. This reality transcends essential reality. This reality is beyond essence and existence, for it is the ground and source of all. For Tillich, this reality is being-itself, God. It includes within itself, being and non-being, and yet, transcends them.

Man, as an existing being, has "fallen" from his essential nature. In his state of essence he could grasp the state of reality, but the Myth of the Fall points to the fact that man is in existence and estranged from the ground of his being. Reason in its existential situation does not disclose reality as it actually is. This makes myth and symbol necessary to

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<sup>1</sup>Harry M. Tiebout, Jr., "Freud and Theology," Religion in Life (Spring, 1958), 271.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 267.



the religious expression of man. Reason, in its "fallen" state is able in its depth to transcend its finitude. The depth of reason asks the question of revelation.

The "fallen" state of man necessitates the dialectic of revelation. Being-itself uses the material of the finite world in revelation, and yet, it is not contained in the finite. In whatever sense religious symbols convey knowledge of the transcendent, it cannot be in the sense of literal and direct representation. Whenever a form of symbolic expression in thought and ritual becomes dominant, Protestantism will arise and claim that the symbol has become an idol. Protestantism is a continual witness to the conviction that symbols must only be taken as "pointers" to the meaning that they cannot contain. Yet, we must use symbolic forms if we are to have content to our religion. We think that we overcome the dilemma of Roman ritualism with a theology of the "Word." This amounts to exchanging auditory symbol for visual symbol. Words are no less symbolic than the sign of the cross.

The inner dilemma of Protestantism lies in this, that it must protest against every religious or cultural realization which seeks to be intrinsically valid, but that it needs such a realization if it is to be able to make its protest in any meaningful way.<sup>3</sup>

The religious mind needs both to seek expression in symbols and, at the same time, to deny their literal meaning.

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<sup>3</sup>Paul Tillich, The Religious Situation, translated by H. Richard Niebuhr (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), p. 192.

The protest of Protestantism becomes very clear in its symbolization of God. We must not "thingify" God for He is beyond our knowing, the Deus Absconditus. In Tillich's original German there is a pun, "You make a Ding (thing) out of Das Unbedingte (the unconditioned).<sup>4</sup> This "hidden" God reveals Himself to us in events of which He is the ground and source. The revelation of God to man is not in words. The locus of revelation is not propositions, but events. The events are then expressed in words, in terms of appreciation and meaning. We can speak of verbal inspiration only in terms of a correct appreciation of events in which the Divine has been at work. The "yes" of revelation is the ability of the encounter to point to God. The "no" of revelation is the denial of the pointer as containing in itself the Uncontained.

The dialectic of revelation has resulted in a crucial struggle in the life of the Church. The two demands of man must be satisfied. Man demands the ultimacy of the divine object of his faith, and the concreteness of the divine in making vital contact with human needs. Only the ultimate Being can finally hold man's adoration; only a concretely mediated Being can touch his life. If the former overcomes the latter, then the deity becomes remote and inaccessible; if the latter triumphs over the former, idolatrous deification takes place. The dilemma is overcome in the divine-human mediator, Jesus, who is the Christ of God.

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<sup>4</sup>Walter Marshall Horton, Christian Theology: An Ecumenical Approach, revised edition (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), p. 71.

The quest for the concrete-absolute, for the union of form and mystery brings us to three terms which are among Tillich's best known. He uses the categories of "autonomy," "heteronomy," and "theonomy" which,

answer the question of the nomos or the law of life in three different ways: Autonomy asserts that man as the bearer of universal reason is the source and measure of culture and religion--that he is his own law. Heteronomy asserts that man, being unable to act according to universal reason, must be subjected to a law, strange and superior to him. Theonomy asserts that the superior law is, at the same time, the innermost law of man himself, rooted in the divine ground which is man's own ground: the law of life transcends man, although it is, at the same time, his own.<sup>5</sup>

In this way Tillich shows that a "heteronomous culture" subjects the forms of thinking and acting to authoritative criteria of an ecclesiastical religion or a political quasi-religion, even at the price of destroying the structures of rationality. Such a situation calls for the revolt of autonomy. The "autonomous culture" attempts to create the forms of personal and social life without reference to something ultimate and unconditional. But autonomy lacks stability or staying power. A "theonomous culture" seeks to avoid the weakness and evils of both autonomy and heteronomy. It expresses in its creations an ultimate concern and a transcending meaning not as something strange but as its own spiritual ground.

A religious symbol uses the material of ordinary experience in speaking of God, but in such a way that the ordinary meaning of the material used is both affirmed and denied. Every religious symbol negates

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<sup>5</sup>Paul Tillich, The Protestant Era, translated by James Luther Adams (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), pp. 56-57.

itself in its literal meaning, but it affirms itself in its self-transcending meaning.<sup>6</sup>

Man needs symbols to express his ultimate concern, but these symbols must point beyond themselves. We must not commit idolatry, making words our gods.

We need demythologization against the confusion of literalism with symbolism, and we need at the same time symbolization as full and rich as possible. . . . For it is the first step in the deterioration of religion when it identifies symbols with the world of finite interrelations which furnishes the material of the symbols--which are the material and not that which is signified. That which is signified lies beyond the symbolic material. This is the first and last thing we must say about religious symbolism.<sup>7</sup>

In his early writings Tillich said that all knowledge of God had a symbolic character.<sup>8</sup> But when this brought the charge of pan-symbolism,<sup>9</sup> Tillich retreated from this extreme position and acknowledged that there must be some non-symbolic element in religious knowledge. He gives credit to W. M. Urban for compelling him to make this change in his theory.<sup>10</sup> His present position is that unless the realm of symbolic knowledge is delimited by unsymbolic knowledge, it is impossible

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), II, 9.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Tillich, "Theology and Symbolism," Religious Symbolism, edited by K. Ernest Johnson (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955), p. 116.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Tillich, "The Religious Symbol," Journal of Liberal Religion, II (1940), 28.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Tillich, "Reply to Interpretation and Criticism," The Theology of Paul Tillich, edited by C. W. Kegley and R. W. Bretall (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1952), p. 334.

to speak of symbolic knowledge.

Urban also took issue with Tillich on his statement that the religious symbol referred to "the unconditioned transcendent, the source of both existence and meaning, which transcends being-in-itself as well as being-for-us."<sup>11</sup> Urban maintained that unless there was some literal knowledge, either immediate or mediate, concerning the referent of the religious symbol, then religious symbolism became mere symbolism. Unless there was some analogy of being between being-itself and being-for-us, then it was futile to talk of either religious symbolism or religious knowledge.<sup>12</sup> Tillich accepted this criticism. He no longer refers to God as "the unconditioned transcendent." He asserts that God is "being-itself." There is an analogy of being between being-itself and being-for-us which allows us to speak meaningfully and symbolically about God. He maintains that there is a non-symbolic assertion concerning God, namely: God is being-itself.<sup>13</sup>

But I wonder if Tillich ever overcomes pan-symbolism. What does being-itself tell us about God. Surely not that God exists. Tillich vehemently rejects the existence of God. Surely not that God is personal. Tillich vehemently rejects the personality of God. What is literal and non-symbolic about "being-itself?" I would guess that Tillich would say that we can have no literal concepts of God. We

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<sup>11</sup>Paul Tillich, "The Religious Symbol," Journal of Liberal Religion, p. 26.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>13</sup>Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, I, 238.

can say literally that God is being-itself, but we have no literal concepts of being-itself. So the issue remains unsolved except in terms of a dialectic.

Another area where more study should be done is in the Christology of Paul Tillich. How does Tillich deal with the humanity of Jesus except in terms of docetism? Protestant theology in principle says that no absolute claim is made for the earthly and finite Jesus. Rather, by means of uninterrupted unity with God and self-sacrifice, Jesus points beyond himself to the depth of being to which he is transparent. It is in this sense that Jesus is a final revelation. The finality is in the unity and self-sacrifice of Jesus with the ground of being. The incarnation is the paradox of essential Godmanhood within existence, and under the conditions of existence, in which he does not lose its essential character. In Jesus as the Christ the essential structure of being is transparent to its unconditioned depths. Jesus overcame the cleavage between finiteness and infinity which characterizes existence. Like any symbol, Jesus is concrete and yet, transcends the concrete in the ground of meaning to which his life and death point. If we hold to this conception of the incarnation and atonement, will not we have to drop the classical doctrines of Christology and Atonement?<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Bernard M. Loomer, "Tillich's Theology of Correlation," Journal of Religion (July, 1949), 132ff.

While at Washington University, I had the opportunity to discuss Tillich with Doctor Huston Smith. Together, we formulated the Apostles' Creed in the terminology of Paul Tillich. It would read somewhat as follows:

I believe in being-itself, the creative ground of man's being, resisting and conquering non-being, the creative ground of essential and existential being; and in Jesus as the Christ, the manifestation under the conditions of existence of essential being, which struggles against non-being and finally overcomes it, producing New Being; that New Being is the power to transcend and unite finitude and infinity, existence and essence, under the conditions of existence, and is revealed perfectly only in Jesus as the Christ, who exhibits the New Being for all men. I believe in the dynamic power of creativity, the actuality of New Being in the community of the Church, the final victory of New Being over the ambiguities of existence, and finally life beyond ambiguity.

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