

GOD, REVELATION, AND RELIGIOUS TRUTH: SOME THEMES AND PROBLEMS IN THE THEOLOGY OF PAUL TILLICH

Robert C. Coburn

This paper begins with an explanation of why, despite their obscurity, Tillich's writings have been attractive to a wide audience. I then describe some of the main features of his mature theological position and discuss a number of the central questions and difficulties to which this position gives rise. The discussion focuses on such questions as whether Tillich can justify holding his own "interpretations" of traditional Christian ideas to have a privileged status, whether the deliteralization of traditional Christian language is compatible with the idea that Christianity is a historical religion, how we are to understand Tillich's notion of a symbolic or mythological account's being adequate to revelatory experience, what it is for a "practical interpretation" of revelatory experience to be an adequate expression of such experience, and what is the best way of handling the problems raised by Tillich's claim that there are no literally true statements—or only one literally true statement—about God.

I

James Luther Adams writes that a publisher to whom he had sent the collection of Paul Tillich's papers that eventually came out under the title *The Protestant Era* decided against publication owing in part to the negative review provided by a prominent American theologian. Just a lot of "German gobbledegook," the reviewer had said.¹ Brand Blanshard reports that when Tillich gave a paper at the New York Philosophy Club on "the Absolute and the Ground of Being," his audience contained, along with other philosophical luminaries of the day, G. E. Moore, who was visiting Columbia at the time. The custom of the Club was for each member of the audience to be given the opportunity to make a response to the paper, which the speaker would then address as seemed appropriate. "We all waited for Moore's turn with an uneasy curiosity," Blanshard writes. "When it came, there was an ominous pause followed by an explosion: 'I am sorry to say that there is not a single sentence that Professor Tillich has uttered that I was able to understand—not a single sentence!'"²

There are many reasons for the near-impenetrability of much of Tillich's prose. His mastery of English remained imperfect. Many of his



writings grew out of popular lectures in which he could do little by way of clarifying the intellectual context from which his thought emerged. The intellectual tradition that nourished and shaped his development did not place much stress on clarity and precision of formulation, with the result that he remained comfortable with a style of presentation that did not maximize lucidity.³ The systematic character of his thought makes it difficult to grasp various parts of it without first acquiring some understanding of much of the rest. Many of his central concepts require for their adequate comprehension an understanding of the philosophical and theological traditions out of which they come. And some of his writings appear more concerned to "transform" (or change his audience) than to "inform" (or convey clearly expressed thoughts to) it.

Despite this obscurity, his theological and homiletical writings continue to strike a responsive chord in many readers. In this paper, I shall, first, indicate some of the main features of Tillich's work that explain this *prima facie* puzzling phenomenon. This will occupy Section II. Then, in Section III, I shall draw attention to certain central elements of his theology and, in Section IV, I shall discuss a few of the questions and difficulties to which his position gives rise. Section V will summarize and present the paper's upshot.

II

What explains the attractiveness of Tillich's work to those who are ill-prepared to understand it or whose exposure to it is so limited as to make real understanding virtually impossible?

To begin with, many of those who turn to Tillich's writings for illumination or inspiration do so, I suspect, because, though unable or unwilling to view the religious life as thoroughly misguided, they find much traditional religious language either rebarbative or empty. In other words, they sense something deep and important in the Judeo-Christian tradition, but they find the idea of Yahweh's choosing the ancient Hebrews as "his people" and leading their bloody conquest of Canaan, talk of the promptings of the Holy Spirit and Christ's "real presence" in the wafer and wine, discussions of substitutionary atonement and Christ's two natures, allusions to the Second Coming and the Last Judgment, and so on, as at best a stumbling block to participation in the religious life, at worst an insurmountable barrier. And they find in Tillich a religious thinker who is both steeped in the tradition and an apologist for Christianity, but who yet manages to write—at least frequently—in ways that bypass traditional religious language⁴ and yet seem to convey something of profound religious significance.

Then, too, Tillich is a theologian who insists that religious "truth" can never conflict with any scientific views. He holds, in other words, that there is no religious basis for disputing any of the claims of evolutionary biology or contemporary cosmology; any of the results of historical or archeological research concerning the origins or history of Christianity or any other religious sect or movement; or any findings about personality development or the neurophysiological or psychological causes of

religious experience.⁵ Closely related to this feature of his thought are two other views. There is, first, his view that "faith," properly understood, does not involve believing in the literal truth of propositions for which there is no evidence of a kind that would be at all convincing to an unprejudiced mind.⁶ And, second, there is his view that all theological formulations are necessarily conditioned by the cultural contexts out of which they develop and so lacking in finality.⁷ These stands also, no doubt, are among the sources of his attractiveness. At any rate, not many of those who inhabit the intellectual world of the 20th century are prepared to jettison the most impressive cognitive achievements of mankind in order to maintain their religious views intact. Nor are they disposed to swallow "holy whoppers"⁸ for which nothing can be said or view theological doctrine as exempt from the ravages of time and the conceptual changes its passage brings at an ever increasing rate.

Tillich's explicit rejection of a number of the ideas that are associated with traditional Christianity and that no longer have any purchase on the hearts and minds of a large number of 20th century people doubtless also plays a non-trivial role in explaining the congeniality of his writings to many. Among these rejected ideas are (a) supernaturalistic theism, the idea of God as an all-knowing, all-powerful being, who created the world at some point in the past, acts in the world to realize certain purposes, etc.; (b) the idea that an event occurred in the past that involved the human race's falling from grace and that we are somehow all responsible for the self-centeredness, greed, and pride of human beings that are its consequences; (c) the idea that Jesus was a God-man, a being who was/is possessed of both human and divine natures; (d) the idea of heaven and hell as "places" to one of which each person goes after death and continues to have a sequence of temporally ordered experiences just as he or she did when living on the earth; and (e) the idea that Jesus will return to the earth at some time in the future and set up a court before which all those then living, together with the dead who have just been raised, will pass.⁹

Finally, such features of Tillich's thought as the following are probably also important to some degree in explaining the attractiveness of his writings even when they seem difficult to fathom. There is, first, his sensitivity to the "problems" to which high religion has traditionally spoken, "problems" that fall under such headings as "guilt," "death," and "meaninglessness," and that find classical biblical expression in such writings as Paul's letter to the Romans (chapter 8), Job, and Ecclesiastes.¹⁰ There is, second, his anti-reductionism, i.e., his insistence that phenomena like aesthetic experience and the experience of the moral demand are not to be understood as, for example, merely the result of genetically-based dispositions that reflect nothing more than the selective advantage of genes that find phenotypic expression in such dispositions, but rather should be seen as revealing aspects of reality.¹¹ Then too there is, third, his conviction that what lies at the core of all genuinely religious phenomena are certain experiences that reveal what is ultimately important, that generate within those who have them a kind of seriousness that attaches to nothing else in life, and that, in one

form or another, are ubiquitous and full of "healing" power, the power to mitigate—if only temporarily—the crippling anxieties that are the legacy of our moral failings, the whips and scorns of time, and the feeling of the emptiness of our lives and pursuits that often engulfs us.¹² And, last, there is his emphasis on the deep and ineluctable mystery that pervades existence and that is both catalyzed and expressed by the question, "Why does anything exist at all?"—a theme that runs through the entire corpus of his writings and is expressed in ways that are compelling and resonant.¹³

III

How Tillich manages to incorporate the features of his thought I have just mentioned in an intellectual construction that purports to be a Christian theological system is, of course, a long and complex story. I shall not attempt to tell the whole of that story here. But I shall expound certain parts of it in order to provide a context for the questions and difficulties regarding Tillich's thought that I want to discuss.

I noted above that Tillich thinks that certain experiences lie at the core of all of the historic religions and of all genuinely religious phenomena. I also noted that he believes they are, as he says, "revelatory" experiences.¹⁴ The reason why he speaks of them in this way has two parts. The first is that these experiences purport to be (or present themselves as) experiences in (or through) which something real is "unveiled"¹⁵—indeed, experiences in (or through) which the "really real"¹⁶ or "ultimate reality"¹⁷ is revealed. The second part of his reason for holding these experiences to be revelatory is that they are of such a sort that those who have them are unable not to accept them at face value, so to speak, that is, are unable not to believe that they are in fact revelatory in the ways they purport to be. He puts this latter point in one place by speaking of "the manifestation of the really real"¹⁸ as resisting "absolutely any attempt to be dissolved into subjectivity."¹⁹

Tillich also holds that these experiences purport to be, and so are perforce believed by their subjects to be, experiences of "something which is essentially and necessarily mysterious,"²⁰ indeed, "an infinite mystery,"²¹ as he says. This idea leads to—or is alternatively expressed by—his claim that what is revealed in revelatory experience is something that is not characterizable by the use of any of the concepts we apply in our ordinary, or even highly technical, thought and discourse about the world, or indeed by any concepts we (logically) could come to possess. Tillich puts this point by speaking of what is revealed in revelatory experience as "infinite"²² (i.e., non-finite), since the realm of finite things and events is the realm within which our concepts (and any concepts we could acquire) can be intelligibly said to have application.²³ The central idea here apparently is that any concept we have (or could acquire) will, if it has application at all, apply strictly and literally to some item or items and not to others, and finite things, by definition, are things that stand over against and are distinguishable from other things, actual or possible.²⁴ Moreover, since one of our concepts is the concept of exis-

tence or of an existing thing, it follows that we cannot even speak of that which is unveiled in revelatory experience as existing.²⁵

So revelatory experiences, according to Tillich, present themselves as, and are necessarily believed by their subjects to be, experiences of something that is both really or ultimately real and ineluctably mysterious or ineffable. For this reason he sometimes describes them as experiences of a different dimension of reality—the “vertical” dimension²⁶—and also as experiences of what is “deepest” in reality—the “depth” dimension.²⁷ The assemblage of finite objects and events is thus revealed by revelatory experiences to be merely the “horizontal” dimension or the superficial aspect of reality.

However, even though the aspect of reality that is unveiled in or through revelatory experiences is strictly ineffable, Tillich maintains that there is a vast range of “truths” that can be expressed about it nonetheless. On the face of it, this thesis is quite paradoxical, of course. But the paradoxical quality dissolves when one sees that none of what can be truly said of the infinite or ultimately real is properly taken literally and when one understands what it is for such a non-literal (or “symbolic”) account of the infinite or ultimately real to be true, according to Tillich.

The truth of an account or assertion about the non-finite does not, for Tillich, consist in its “agreement” or “correspondence” with the relevant facts, as is plausibly the case as regards assertions about aspects or features of the realm of finite things. “The criterion of the truth of [an assertion about the infinite] naturally cannot be the comparison of it with [the way it compares with or is similar to?] the reality to which it refers,” Tillich writes, “just because this reality is beyond human comprehension.”²⁸ It may be, of course, that in saying this Tillich has the epistemic sense of ‘criterion’ in mind, i.e., the sense in which a criterion is a “way of telling” that such and such is true. However, the point also stands if, as is not implausible to assume, he has the constitutive sense of ‘criterion’ in mind, i.e., the sense in which the criterion for the truth of proposition *p* is the state of affairs the holding of which would make *p* true. After all, how could a state of affairs that is “beyond human comprehension” be what it is that makes an assertion about the infinite true? If that were so, then we’d have no idea what the assertion in question asserted, given that the content of an assertion is or is given by the state of affairs it asserts to hold.

However we are to read the criterion-passage I have quoted, such a denial of a correspondence theory of religious truth follows in any case from the various accounts of such truth that Tillich provides.²⁹ Perhaps the clearest statement—at least in outline—of the account that is most central in his thinking appears in his book *Dynamics of Faith*. (I say “in outline” because the account requires filling out by reference to various things Tillich says elsewhere.) Even when filled out the account is far from pellucid, but I believe a plausible construal of what he seems to have in mind when all is said and done runs as follows. There are two constitutive “criteria”³⁰ for the truth of an account of what is revealed by a revelatory experience. One is that the account be “alive,”³¹ where this means that the account possesses the power to catalyze revelatory expe-

rience (and hence the faith-state or the state of being ultimately concerned) in those to whom it is addressed.³² The other criterion for the truth of such an account is that its "acceptance" involves appreciation of the fact that it lacks literal truth, i.e., is a "myth"³³ or a "symbolic"³⁴ account. Since Tillich calls a myth "which is understood as a myth" a "broken myth,"³⁵ one could say that an account satisfies this criterion just in case the account is a self-breaking one.

To sum up what I have said so far: Tillich holds that reality is not reducible to the system of finite things that exist in space and time (the natural order) or, as he also puts it, "the entire realm of objective things and events."³⁶ The reason reality is not to be so understood is that certain experiences reveal something, a dimension of the real, that transcends the finite realm. Moreover, Tillich maintains that nothing can be said about this dimension that is literally true;³⁷ the infinite is ineffable. But some accounts of that which revelatory experiences reveal are, nonetheless, true—in a sense. These "true" accounts are the accounts that are either "alive," "self-breaking," or both.³⁸

I want next to draw attention to a certain semantic doctrine Tillich embraces and then to make some points about how the views I have so far ascribed to him are connected, on his view, with the ideas that make up classical Christian doctrine.

The semantic doctrine Tillich holds to which I refer can be expressed thus. The theses that (a) reality is not reducible to the system of finite things and that (b) nothing can be said about what more there is that is literally true will be intelligible only to those who accept these theses. The reason Tillich is committed to this strange doctrine is not far to seek. He thinks that a necessary condition of anyone's understanding his talk of "the infinite," the vertical dimension, that which transcends the finite realm, etc. is that this person have had a revelatory experience;³⁹ and, in addition, he thinks that no one can have such an experience without accepting it at face value, that is, accepting that what it purports to reveal it really does reveal.⁴⁰ But these ideas obviously entail the semantic doctrine in question.

Turning now to the relation of Tillich's views to the ideas that make up the doctrinal scheme of classical Christianity, it's clear, to begin with, that at the center of this scheme is the idea of God. Now insofar as this is the idea of something that transcends the world of things in space and time, something that is beyond human comprehension, and something that is "ultimately" or "really" real—more real or more fully real than anything else?—then it is just the idea of "the infinite" that Tillich has. But traditionally the idea of God involves other ingredients as well. At any rate, God is thought to have features other than these whatever the proper analysis of the concept. Does Tillich do justice to such traditional ways of thinking about God when he identifies God with "the infinite," "the vertical dimension," "the really real," etc., as he uses these expressions?

I believe he does as regards the most central of these ways of thinking anyhow. For, in addition to revealing the reality of the infinite and its ineffability, revelatory experience, according to Tillich, purports to unveil—and so is believed by those who have such experiences to

unveil—"something ultimately important."⁴¹ Insofar it presents itself as—and so is believed to be—"the manifestation of what concerns us ultimately,"⁴² i.e., something we cannot but take with unconditional seriousness.⁴³ It's not implausible, I think, to maintain that among the most central features in the traditional Christian idea of God is the feature that Luther expressed when he said that God is "that to which [the] heart clings and entrusts itself."⁴⁴ And this is but a slightly different way of expressing the idea Tillich expresses when he speaks of God as that which "concerns us ultimately," as something which exceeds everything else in importance and which is properly taken with a kind of seriousness that is of a different order from that felt about anything else.

But Tillich has a way of accommodating all the other ways of thinking about God that one finds in the Christian tradition, too. His way of doing this can be brought out by noting his way of answering the question whether the term 'God' has a referent.

His answer to this question is, I believe, threefold: "Yes," "No," and "Yes, but" Let me explain. The answer is "Yes" insofar as the word refers to that which is revealed in revelatory experience, viz., "the infinite," "the really real," or "ultimate reality." The answer is "No," however, if a word refers only if it refers to "something," and it's true, as Tillich believes, that "to be something is to be finite."⁴⁵ In other words, there is a sense in which the word 'God' doesn't have any referent at all, for Tillich, insofar as it fails to refer to something that possesses determinate features which distinguish it from other things actual or possible, that can be an object of knowledge, that can be acted on, etc.—in short, insofar as it fails to refer to some *finite* reality.

An obvious implication of this view—and one which Tillich explicitly accepts—is that even if there did exist an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good being who created the spatiotemporal realm and all its inhabitants, something Tillich thinks there is no reason to believe,⁴⁶ this being would not be God. This is so because, as he uses the term 'finite', such a being would be a finite object, even if unlimited (and in that sense "infinite") as regards its knowledge, power, and goodness. Because he accepts this implication, there is a sense in which he is *not* able to accommodate with his conception of God a number of the features traditionally ascribed to God, as well as many of the doctrines that imply or presuppose that God is "finite" in Tillich's sense of the expression, e.g., the doctrine that Jesus possessed a divine nature as well as a human nature⁴⁷ and the doctrine that God causally intervenes in the historical process.⁴⁸

This brings us to Tillich's third answer to the question whether 'God' refers, the "Yes, but ..." answer. The basis for ascribing an answer of this form to Tillich lies in the fact that, for Tillich, there is a sense in which 'God' refers to a fictional object. As noted above, no account of what is revealed in revelatory experience is, for Tillich, literally true; in other words, all such accounts are, as he says, "mythological" or "symbolic." But the word 'God' appears in many such literally false accounts. So this is a use of the word according to which what it refers to is a fictional object in something close to the sense in which the names 'Hamlet' and 'Paul Bunyon' refer to fictional objects. Thus in the story of Creation—in

either its biblical form or any of its more sophisticated theological forms—'God' refers to the being upon whose action(s) (or activity) the spatiotemporal world depends for its coming into existence and its remaining in existence; but since the story is not literally true but rather mythological in character, the referent of 'God' in the story does not really exist—any more than Sherlock Holmes really exists. Moreover, even if there were a being who created the spatiotemporal world and preserves it in existence, such a being would not be the referent of 'God' when the word appears in the myths any more than a historical person who was a detective, had the name 'Sherlock Holmes', and did many or all of the things Conan Doyle's stories report Holmes as doing would be the referent of the name 'Sherlock Holmes' that appears in the stories. After all, the Sherlock Holmes of the stories is such that it is neither true nor false of him that he weighed exactly 163 lbs. on his 30th birthday—assuming none of the stories contains any such description of Holmes; whereas it is either true or false of any historical person that he weighed exactly 163 lbs. on his 30th birthday if his life extends that far. The argument would be analogous for the case of 'God'. The actual creator, if there were one, would not be the referent of the term 'God' in the stories of Creation because the subject of the stories is essentially indeterminate in various respects in a way an actual creator would not be.

Similar points can be made, of course, in connection with the stories about the fall of man, the inspiration of the prophets, the incarnation, the emergence of the church, the second coming, and the last judgment, *inter alia*. None are literally true, for Tillich. So the references to God that are essential features of them all are references to a fictional object. And no entity that actually exists could be identical with such a fictional object.

The upshot of this discussion of Tillich's answers to the question whether 'God' refers to anything is that Tillich's way of accommodating many of the features traditionally built into the concept of God (in particular, omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect goodness), as well as many of the theological doctrines involving this concept that are part and parcel of classical Christianity, involves viewing these features as attributes of a fictional object and these doctrines as elements in a lengthy story about this object that is also essentially fictional. No doubt many will feel that this treatment does considerably less than justice to many of the fundamental ideas of classical Christianity. Tillich's response to a criticism of this sort would be not unlike Schleiermacher's to a similar criticism directed at him. Schleiermacher writes of "the conception of a personal God" that it "is necessary whenever one would interpret to himself or to others immediate religious emotions, or whenever the heart has immediate intercourse with the Highest Being. Yet," he continues, "the profoundest of the church fathers have ever sought to purify the idea. Were the definite expression they have used to clear away what is human and limited in the form of personality put together, it would be as easy to say that they denied personality to God as that they ascribed it to Him."⁴⁹ Again, when "the representative imagination and the dialectic conscience ... fashion a too human personality, ["the pious sense"] restrains by exhibiting the doubtful consequences" and

limits "the representation ... by negative formulas."⁵⁰ Similarly, Tillich would respond by appealing to the mystical strain prominent in the theological tradition—especially from the 2nd to the 14th centuries—and he would insist on the power of genuine revelatory experience to require the deliteralization of all religious and theological discourse.⁵¹

I conclude this brief account of Tillich's theological position with a few comments on the unusual language he employs in place of traditional Christian language when he presents and discusses the Christian doctrinal story. I refer here to his use of 'being itself', 'the power of being', and 'the ground and abyss of being' in place of 'God';⁵² his talk of Jesus as "the New Being" rather than as "the Christ" and "the Messiah";⁵³ his replacement of 'sin' by 'estrangement';⁵⁴ his preference for 'the Spiritual Presence' over 'the Holy Spirit' and 'the Spiritual Community' over 'the (invisible) church';⁵⁵ his employment of Schelling's expression 'essentialization' when elucidating the classical idea of "eternal life";⁵⁶ his substitution of 'the transparency of all things to the ground of being' for 'the Kingdom of God';⁵⁷ and so on.

Many find this neologistic jargon obscure. Others—especially traditional Christian believers—find it repellent. Their reason, of course, is that insofar as the jargon expresses any clear content at all, the content it expresses is, they feel, quite distinct from that conveyed by traditional Christian language. In addition, Tillich's strange language causes problems because it sometimes appears to be employed in ways that entail contradictions. Thus, in providing his account of what the idea of eternal life amounts to, Tillich insists, on the one hand, that eternal life involves the preservation of the individuality of each person while, on the other, also insisting that "it does not mean a continuation of temporal life after death."⁵⁸ And in providing his understanding of the "the fall," Tillich holds that it is not an event that took place in the past;⁵⁹ yet he also holds that it is a state of things that we are responsible for and so presumably brought about.⁶⁰ Again, the New Being is said to be Jesus's being (or "essential being under the conditions of existence"⁶¹) and hence "something that appears in a personal life,"⁶² but also something that is not separable from the biblical picture of Jesus's life,⁶³ the Spiritual Community that arose from that life,⁶⁴ what is manifested in revelatory experience,⁶⁵ a new state of things,⁶⁶ and the Kingdom of God.⁶⁷

However, all of these difficulties dissolve, it seems to me, once one recognizes that, for Tillich, everything said in the course of elucidating or "interpreting" traditional Christian language by employment of this different language is to be understood to be as devoid of literal truth as, on his view, assertions that use the traditional language are. Statements that use the traditional language are, he insists, mythological through and through, and his "interpretations" of these statements are, for the most part,⁶⁸ just more of the same,⁶⁹ despite being cast in language redolent of the metaphysical tradition, especially the neoplatonic tradition. Thus, he insists repeatedly that his talk of the ground of being, the power of being, the abyss of being, etc. is symbolic (in his sense).⁷⁰ He does, to be sure, say that the statement 'God is identical with being itself' is literally true. But he also implies, as I have noted above, that what this

identity claim really amounts to is the assertion that God is ineffable, that everything we correctly affirm of God has to be taken non-literally or symbolically.⁷¹ But now if this is so, then all the talk of the fall from essential being into existence, the New Being's coming into the world in Jesus, the Spiritual Presence's creating the Spiritual Community, essentialization, etc. is perforce similarly symbolic. In the final analysis, it all functions to express what is revealed in revelatory experience, and since all language that serves this function is symbolic or mythological, everything that is said using his non-traditional language has the same status.

It follows that these accounts will not be obscure to those who have had revelatory experiences of the kind that they best express and will be quite unintelligible to those, if any—more on this later—, who have not had such experiences.⁷² Moreover, the fact that these ways of talking appear to express ideas far removed from those expressed by traditional Christian language or involve contradictions is neither here nor there, from Tillich's point of view. What they literally express, if anything, is not what makes them an adequate expression of religious truth. No words, taken literally, are adequate *in this way*. And being contradictory is not a sufficient condition of a statement's lacking adequacy in this way either. For what makes an assertion or account an adequate expression of religious truth, to the extent that it is, is, from Tillich's perspective, (primarily?) the fact that it is "alive" and (perhaps also) "self-breaking," and these characteristics can be present whatever the literal significance of a collection of words, however many contradictions an account involves, or indeed whether the words, taken together, make any sense at all: a "word salad" can be just as "alive" as the theology in Paul's letter to the Romans or Johann Gerhard's 9-volume theological tome, *Loci Theologici*.

IV

I turn now to a discussion of a number of questions and problems to which Tillich's thought naturally gives rise. For each I shall suggest, when I can, what seems to me to be the best response open to one who finds Tillich's theological orientation congenial. The discussion will require filling in many details that the foregoing outline of Tillich's thought omits.

1. I have noted that Tillich regards his own singular elucidations or interpretations of Christian ideas—the ideas of creation, the fall, the incarnation, etc.—as mythological or symbolic and hence as having a status that, on his view, is in no way different either from that of traditional formulations of Christian truth or the biblical material that (in part) underlies these formulations. I have also drawn attention to his view that the "adequacy" of a mythic or symbol system as an expression of what is revealed in revelatory experience is determined by whether or not, or the extent to which, it is "alive" and "self-breaking." The first problem I shall consider arises because he also appears to give a special or privileged status to his own interpretations of traditional Christian ideas, and this appears to be inconsistent with the above view about the adequacy of a symbol system.

The basis for saying that he appears to give a special or privileged status to his own interpretations is his claim that his "interpretations"⁷³—or "reinterpretations"⁷⁴—present the "conceptual content"⁷⁵ or "real meaning"⁷⁶ or "original meaning"⁷⁷ or "fundamental meaning"⁷⁸ of the ideas in these traditional formulations, and this claim clearly suggests that he thinks his ways of talking about creation, the fall, the incarnation, the Kingdom of God, eternal life, and so on are "better" than more traditional ways—the ways one finds, for example, in Paul, Augustine, and Calvin; in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds; and in the Augsburg Confession and the Thirty-nine Articles.⁷⁹

Closely related to this problem is another. In section II above I indicated that Tillich believes that any formulation of Christian truth will be culturally conditioned and insofar relative to a particular historical situation. One reason for this is that any such formulation will perforce make use of the conceptual materials available at the particular historical period in which it arises.⁸⁰ This view also appears incompatible with his idea that certain ways of expressing traditional ideas capture their conceptual content, whereas others are, in some sense, non-conceptual in character; and that certain expressions of traditional ideas convey their real or original or fundamental meaning, whereas others either distort that meaning or convey later semantic accretions or substitutions for it. For how could some formulation get at the conceptual content or real/original/fundamental meaning of certain ideas in a way others do not if every formulation is conceptually relative to the particular historical situation in which it arises?

It might be thought, of course, that this latter problem is not serious because there has historically been a (more or less) continuous enrichment of the conceptual materials available to thinkers, with the result that a 20th century thinker is in a better position to express the truth in traditional Christian formulations than his or her predecessors have been. But this won't do, from Tillich's point of view, because the central criteria of adequacy for an expression of religious truth is whether it's alive or self-breaking, and it's difficult to see any basis for thinking either feature will necessarily be greater in historical periods that are conceptually richer than their predecessors.

A similar point can be made in connection with the former problem. It won't do to handle it by saying that only expressions of religious truth that are somehow conceptually better than earlier formulations of that truth or that somehow capture the real, original, or fundamental meaning of such earlier formulations are really adequate expressions of the content of the revelatory experiences that lie behind the earlier formulations because, again, there is no reason to suppose that any such expression of what the revelatory experiences in question reveal better meets the central criteria of adequacy Tillich lays out than any earlier (or different) expression.

I suspect the best way out of these difficulties for Tillich—and anyone attracted to Tillich's general orientation—would be to give up the idea that the strange-sounding, murky, and occasionally incoherent renditions of traditional Christian ideas that he provides capture the concep-

tual content or provide the real, original, or fundamental meaning of these ideas, and hold instead that these renditions have exactly the same status as any other attempts at articulating the ineffable content of revelatory experience and so are to be judged as regards their adequacy in the same way all others are judged, from his point of view. This is the best way out, I believe, for several reasons. First, it's hard to see how he could develop a significantly different set of criteria of adequacy for expressions of revealed truth, given the centrality to his thought of the idea that the content of revelatory experience is ineffable. Second, it would be very implausible to hold that attempts at articulating religious truth are *not* relative to the cultural situation out of which they arise, not to mention such a view's being incompatible with the ineffability thesis and the quasi-pragmatic⁸¹ understanding of the adequacy of such articulations that this thesis entails. Finally, the notions of an account's getting at the conceptual content of traditional Christian ideas, or expressing their real (original/fundamental) meaning, are neither clear as they stand nor provided any elucidation by Tillich. The "conceptual content" formulation has Hegelian overtones, of course.⁸² But that doesn't suffice to make the way of talking clear. And what is supposed to be the difference between giving expression to the "real" or "fundamental" meaning of a sentence, as opposed to its meaning? And are we to suppose the authors of the Nicene Creed didn't know what their sentences meant? The idea of expressing the "original" meaning of a form of words or collection of sentences that has been repeated down the centuries is, of course, reasonably clear. But surely there is no basis whatever for thinking that Tillich's queer renditions of traditional Christian ideas do that. Did Paul have in mind the things Tillich says about God or eternal life when he invoked the concept? Did Augustine think that 'the fall' did not refer to a past event? Did Calvin mean by 'the wrath of God' what Tillich says is the correct interpretation of that "symbol," viz., that it is to be understood in such a way (i.e.) that God's wrath does *not* express a motive for action?⁸³

Tillich might, of course, claim that his renditions of traditional Christian ideas are more adequate than more familiar formulations of Christian doctrine on the ground that his are alive or self-breaking, and that these others are not—or perhaps not *as* alive and not *as* self-breaking. Such a claim, however, would not be very plausible. It's hard to see that the Tillichian accounts of creation, the fall, the incarnation, the kingdom of God, and the second coming, for example, are such that "accepting" them (or encountering them and having them in mind) necessarily issue in the recognition that they are not literally true. They won't *necessarily* be seen to be incoherent or otherwise senseless; and if they aren't, what else about them would *necessarily* have this consequence? Nor is it obvious that Tillich's accounts are alive in a way that Billy Graham's theology is not—or more alive than such competitors. In any case, how alive a theological scheme is is, it seems, an empirical matter, and no evidence is given or, I suspect, available in support of any claims about the aliveness or deadness of different schemes.

2. Some additional questions involving the notion of a mythological

account and the idea of such an account's adequacy are the following. There is, first, the question of what the relation is between the adequacy of an account and the two criteria of adequacy I have described. Second, there is the question of what a myth's being alive really amounts to, and connected with this the question whether any myths really are alive. And, third, there is the question whether the program of deliteralization Tillich recommends is compatible with Christianity. I shall consider these questions seriatim.

The adequacy (or "truth") of an account of what a revelatory experience reveals is determined for Tillich,⁸⁴ I have said, by asking two questions: (1) Is it alive? and (2) Is it self-breaking? That is, does it tend to engender in those who embrace (or encounter?) it revelatory experience? And does it convey to those who embrace (or encounter?) it its status as myth? Now what exactly does this view amount to? Is it that satisfying one of these conditions makes an account adequate (or "true"), is it that an account that satisfies both conditions is more adequate ("truer") than one that only satisfies one, or is it that an account is adequate (or "true") only if it satisfies both conditions? Then, too, there is the question whether being alive and being self-breaking come in degrees. If they do, then a new cluster of related questions arises; spelling them out is left as an exercise for the reader.

I don't think there are clear answers to any of these questions in Tillich's writings. Given his views about the variety⁸⁵ and ubiquity⁸⁶ of revelatory experiences, he would have done best to say that aliveness does come in degrees. And since people can be dimly as well as fully aware of a great variety of matters, he should have said the same of self-breakingness. Then, it might be thought, the most plausible way of developing the idea he seems to have in mind as regards the adequacy of an account of the content of revelatory experiences would be to say that any such account is more or less adequate depending upon the extent to which it is *both* alive and self-breaking. These are independent criteria; both are important indicators of adequacy; and no account could be adequate at all that completely lacked either feature. That is, an account that was in no way conducive to revelatory experience would be wholly inadequate. And similarly for an account that failed to catalyze in its adherents "the religious reservation,"⁸⁷ the awareness that it was radically inadequate as a picture or representation of the truth.

Turning now to the second question I distinguished at the outset of this discussion, what it is for an account to be "self-breaking" is relatively clear. An account has this feature when something about it ensures that those who accept or understand it see that the account is wrongly understood if it is taken to be literally true. Somehow "the religious reservation" is built into the account; alternatively, the account embodies the Protestant or prophetic principle⁸⁸—the principle that says that any account of religious truth stands under the divine judgment and is insofar false in some way or ways—and embodies it in a reflexive way. In Christianity, this feature is present, according to Tillich, in virtue of the theme that "Jesus could not have been the Christ without sacrificing himself as Jesus to himself as the Christ."⁸⁹ The Christian myth's contain-

ing the story of the crucifixion of the God-man, in other words, is what ensures its self-breaking quality.

However, what it is for an account to be alive is less clear. I said earlier that Tillich's view seems to be that an account is alive provided its acceptance catalyzes revelatory experience(s?) in its adherents. Since "faith," for Tillich, is the condition a person is in by virtue of his being the subject of a revelatory experience,⁹⁰ the view might be alternatively expressed by saying that an account that is alive is one that generates the faith-state in anyone who embraces it. More fully, it gives rise in its adherents to a condition that is variously described as "shaking [and] transforming";⁹¹ as carrying a sense of being subject to an "unconditional claim";⁹² as a condition of "numinous astonishment" and "dread";⁹³ as involving "judgment" and "healing";⁹⁴ as being "grasped by a peace which is above reason"⁹⁵ and a "great and restful happiness";⁹⁶ as issuing in a life that involves increased sensitivity to others, freedom from self-contempt and hubris, and a sense of the unconditional validity of moral requirements;⁹⁷ and as a state such that when

we look at our finite concerns... everything seems the same and yet everything is changed. We are still concerned about all these things but differently—the anxiety is gone! It still exists and tries to return. But its power is broken; it cannot destroy us anymore.⁹⁸

But how does embracing such an account generate faith, when the faith-state is understood in this way? Indeed, what is it to embrace such an account? Taking the latter question first, it's clear that embracing or accepting such an account cannot always be believing it. For to believe an account is to believe it to be true, and such accounts can only be believed true when they are not self-breaking. At best, in this case, it could be believed to be an adequate expression of the content of (a) revelatory experience. And this, for Tillich it seems, would be to believe that it is alive or self-breaking. So we do not get clear about what accepting such an account amounts to in the self-breaking case by saying it's believing the account to be adequate as an expression of the content of (a) revelatory experience. The circle is much too small! What could accepting an account that one recognizes to be symbolic be, then?

There are two possibilities, I suggest. First, one might believe that the account bears some unspecific and unspecifiable analogy to the truth as revealed in revelatory experience. And Tillich does talk in ways that suggest he has something like this in mind. He says that symbolic accounts "participate" in the reality to which they point, as I have noted. But it's clear in view of his suggestion that such participation underlies the classical doctrine of *analogia entis*,⁹⁹ one naturally supposes it involves "identity (sameness) in certain respects and not in others." Unfortunately, this path leads to a deadend. So long as he sticks to the thesis that nothing can be said about the infinite that is literally true, the idea that one can give an account of it that bears some analogy to the truth about it is empty. For one would have no idea in what respect or respects the analogy(ies) held. Since there is no limit to the respects in

which one thing can be similar to another, it is vacuous to talk of *a* and *b* being similar when nothing can be said about the respect(s) in which the similarity holds.¹⁰⁰

The other possibility is that accepting a broken myth is like the relation a person has to a novel when he fully enters into the fictional world it depicts. He is, for example, saddened by the death of the hero's beloved, he is afraid that a terrible fate will overtake the orphaned child, he cares what happens to the elderly man who had a stroke on p. 359, and so on. In other words, a person embraces a broken myth when he—at least often—thinks and feels in (many of the) ways that would be appropriate if he thought the myth literally true, despite recognizing that it isn't.¹⁰¹

This conception of what acceptance of a broken myth comes to is, I think, intelligible. It also provides a good deal of insight into a condition that on the face of it is quite baffling, namely, that of the "believer" who, when pushed or when reflecting in her study, is prepared to acknowledge that all of her "religious beliefs" are subject to the divine judgment, so to speak, i.e., do not really represent the way things are. But, unfortunately, it leaves quite obscure how it is that acceptance of a broken myth could catalyze revelatory experience or generate the faith-state.

Tillich (or one) might take the view that there is an empirical connection between embracing a broken myth in the sense explained and having revelatory experience, and we just have no idea why this connection holds. But this line would not be very convincing. There is no evidence of any such connection. Nor is there even any evidence of such a connection between straightforward acceptance of the literal truth of a religious myth and the occurrence of revelatory experiences.

It seems, then, that what it is for a myth to be alive can be elucidated, but whether any *are* alive in this sense is far from obvious. Perhaps what Tillich should have said, then, is that an account is alive just in case having it frequently in mind can play a non-trivial role in keeping vividly before one's mind or deeply in one's heart the revelatory experience (or faith-state) that led one to embrace it in the first place.

The third question I distinguished—the question whether the Tillichian idea that all accounts of religious truth should be "deliteralized," i.e., understood as merely symbolic (in his sense), is compatible with classical Christianity—arises because Christianity is a historical religion, that is, a religion that essentially involves certain claims about what has happened in human history. How, it might be asked, could it be the case that all religious truths are symbolic in character and yet also the case that the truth of Christianity involves the truth of certain propositions about historical occurrences?

This problem can be dealt with without any significant modification of Tillich's thought, I believe. As I have noted, Tillich distinguishes mythological formulations from that which these formulations seek to express, namely, the content of revelatory experience. That God, the Creator of all things visible and invisible, 2000 years ago came down from heaven and took on human form, was crucified, died, and then three days later rose from the dead, is a part of the Christian myth, for

Tillich. None of this involves any historical claims since, properly understood, it involves no claims of a literal kind at all. On the other hand, that a man named Jesus, who hailed from Nazareth, carried on an itinerant ministry in Palestine 2000 years ago, a ministry that culminated in his death on a cross in his early 30s, is a historical truth. So also is the proposition that his followers became convinced of his resurrection, formed a Jewish sect, which, as a result largely of the work of Paul of Tarsus, eventually developed into a non-Jewish religious community that spread throughout the Roman Empire. But these latter truths are not peculiarly religious; they are not what make Christianity a historical religion. It's rather the identification of a figure in the myth with a historical person, and related theses, that link Christianity with historical occurrences. This identification and its congeners, however, do not entail that any peculiarly religious truth—in particular Christian truth—is non-symbolic in character. It's a religious truth that Jesus was the Christ, but *that* is not a matter of history, i.e., a matter that might be confirmed or disconfirmed by historical investigation. What makes that thesis "true" is its adequacy as an expression of revelatory experience. And the criteria of such adequacy are that the thesis, or better the entire myth of which it is a part, be alive and self-breaking.

If the question is raised as to why that particular historical personage was selected as the fitting subject for the Jewish messianic label, the answer, of course, is that he was just one of many to whom the label was attached. In his case, of course, a successful religion arose and a highly reticulate mythology with it. Why was this? Tillich's answer is a variant on Schleiermacher's. It goes in outline thus, I believe. Participation in the life of the church plays a non-trivial role in catalyzing revelatory experiences. The best explanation of this involves appeal to the power of the New Testament records to catalyze such experience. The best explanation of the existence of this biblical material is that it arose as an aspect of and in response to life in the early church and, in particular, the revelatory experience that it both catalyzed and expressed. The best explanation of these facts about the early church is that contact with Jesus himself was a powerful mediator or source of revelatory experience. The best explanation of this is that revelatory experience played a powerful and pervasive role in making him the person he was. Finally, it was because he was the person he was—at least in part—that his life gave rise to the early church, the New Testament records, and the religion that became Christianity and eventually spread to all four corners of the earth owing to the capacity of the religious community in which it was embodied to engender revelatory experience in its participants.¹⁰²

3. Another problem that Tillich's mature thought raises derives from his insistence, on the one hand, that revelatory experience is not "universal," that is, is not "occurring always and everywhere",¹⁰³ and his insistence, on the other, that it *is* "universal" in the sense that no one has not had one or more revelatory experiences. "... to say that these statements [e.g., that "that which is ultimately real is good"] are really meaningless," Tillich says in a late work that is the record of a seminar he gave in the spring of 1963 at the University of California at Santa Barbara, "is

possible only if one has no personal experience ... of something unconditional and infinite...."¹⁰⁴ "Now an incapacity for musical experience may possibly exist among some individuals," he continues, "but I am absolutely certain that the lack of experience of something ultimately important or serious does not exist in any human being."¹⁰⁵ It is important in this connection to realize what Tillich means by an "experience of something ultimately important or serious." He explains the idea earlier in the seminar thus: "... the unconditional or ultimate should not be viewed as part of a pyramid, even if its place is at the top." Why? Because, the context makes clear, if the ultimate were conceived in this way, the object of "ultimate concern" would still be "in the realm of the finite"; an ultimate concern—a concern directed at the ultimate—would be like a "concern for my wife, for my children, for my job, [or] for my work."¹⁰⁶ But the kind of concern that revelatory experience evokes is a "qualitatively different concern"¹⁰⁷ or a concern with something "qualitatively different" from anything finite.

Why does Tillich's denial that revelatory experiences are "occurring always and everywhere," when taken together with his insistence that no one has failed to have revelatory experience, create a problem? The reason is not that these two claims are inconsistent—they're clearly not. The problem rather is that if revelatory experience is not universal in the first sense, it is difficult to see why Tillich is so sure it *is* universal in the second sense. For consider. If revelatory experience is an occasional occurrence, as the first non-universality claim entails, it's hard to see why it couldn't be the case that some people manage to live their entire lives—which may, after all, be prematurely cut short—without having such an experience. And if it *could* be that some do manage this, even if they don't in actual fact, how could Tillich be "absolutely certain" that this possibility isn't realized. In addition, it does seem pretty obvious that many people have never had an experience that *they* would describe as an experience of something that is "ultimately important," where an experience of this kind is not just an experience of something that is "very important or *very, very* important,"¹⁰⁸ but is rather an experience of something such that "nothing is comparable with it in importance."¹⁰⁹ And if *they* wouldn't concede they'd had such an experience, what gives Tillich his certainty that nonetheless each has had an experience it would be *correct* to describe in these terms?

It's not difficult, of course, to see why Tillich is attracted to the first thesis. What lies behind the denial of the universality (in the relevant sense) of revelatory experience is Tillich's view about the features that are always present whenever there occurs a "revelatory constellation."¹¹⁰ To begin, any revelatory experience, on Tillich's view will be an experience that presents itself as (or purports to be) as revelation of "an infinite mystery,"¹¹¹ of "something which is essentially and necessarily mysterious."¹¹² Moreover, such an experience involves what he speaks of as "ontological shock,"¹¹³ which is "a state of mind in which the mind is thrown out of its normal balance, shaken in its structure,"¹¹⁴ a state of mind that is expressed by questions like "Why is there something? Why not nothing?"¹¹⁵ However, this state of mind is not just "present" when-

ever there a revelatory experience; it is also "overcome." "In revelation ... the ontological shock is present and overcome at the same time. It is present in the annihilating power of the divine presence (*mysterium tremendum*) and is overcome in the elevating power of the divine presence (*mysterium fascinosum*)."¹¹⁶ He also speaks of revelatory experience as characterized by the presence of "'numinous' dread"¹¹⁷ in the subject and "the feeling that the solid ground of ordinary reality is taken 'out from under' [his] feet."¹¹⁸ Yet it's also the case that "the center of his personality is transformed: he has received saving power,"¹¹⁹ i.e., the power that "heals" and makes "whole."¹²⁰ In view of this depiction of the revelatory experience, it is not difficult to see what lies behind Tillich's denial that revelatory experience is "occurring always and everywhere." It's obvious that people are not always and everywhere undergoing such shaking and transforming experiences of what purports to be an infinite mystery, etc.

Why Tillich insists that no one fails to have revelatory experience is less evident. But I suspect he is moved by considerations like the following. First and perhaps most central is his conviction that all finite things, to the extent that they are real at all, are so in virtue of their relation to—he says "participation" in—that which is ultimately (or really) real.¹²¹ Given this conviction, it should not be surprising that he thinks that at some level or in some way every human being experiences—even if unconsciously—the "infinite mystery." But no doubt his conviction that everybody is serious about something and serious in a way that is (in some sense) "unconditional" plays a role, too.¹²² For this kind of seriousness, on his view, can have no other source, in the final analysis, than revelatory experience.

There are, I think, two ways in which Tillich could handle the problem raised by these claims about the non-universality of revelatory experience in one sense and its universality in another. The best of them, in my judgment, would be simply to retreat from the second of these claims. He does insist, after all, that simply being serious about something—even if the seriousness is, on any natural way of taking the expression, "unconditional"—is not to be concerned with something "qualitatively different" from anything in the finite realm.¹²³ So the mere fact that people frequently are very serious about certain matters does not provide any basis for his thesis about the ubiquity (or universality in the second sense) of revelatory experience. And given the very unusual features of revelatory experience on his view, which I have noted above, it's hard to see how a person could have such an experience and be unaware of he was having it. Also, it's hard to see why "participation" in that which is really real should be sufficient for the occurrence of such experiences, given that they are not occurring "always and everywhere."

If he were to solve the problem in this way, he would, I think, have to abandon an idea of considerable importance to him, however. This is the idea embodied in his slogan "Religion is the substance of culture and culture is the expression [or form] of religion."¹²⁴ Religion is simply not sufficiently pervasive—at least in the current culture of the industrialized West—to make true anything close to such a thesis, assuming that

religion is understood as a phenomenon that is rooted in revelatory experience and that revelatory experience is *not* present wherever there is seriousness about some project, idea, policy, person, or social issue.

The other way of handling the problem avoids this cost. It would consist in modifying his understanding of what counts as revelatory experience. He could do this by taking the features he mentions in characterizing revelatory experience as definitive only of *paradigm* revelatory experiences, or revelatory experiences of an especially powerful and singular kind. This move would make it possible for him to allow for revelatory experience of less pronounced kinds—indeed, for a continuum of revelatory experience at one end of which lie the experiences he describes in the section of his *Systematic Theology* called “The Meaning of Revelation” and at the other end of which lie experiences of the sort that underlie the kind of seriousness characteristic of anybody who isn’t, as he says, “deprived completely of a center [or “dominating center”].”¹²⁵

If he solved the problem in this way, he might still have to give up the ubiquity claim—and so concede, as seems plausible, that some people lack a dominating center—but he’d be able to hold a thesis pretty close to it. And he could keep the non-universality claim by restricting it so that it covered only the revelatory experiences at the far end of the continuum. Moreover, there would be a good deal of plausibility to the idea his “religion and culture” slogan encapsulates.

Still, the second solution is less attractive than the first, I think. The reason lies in the implausibility of claiming that any experience that underlies a person’s coming to be serious about something is an experience which purports to be an experience of ultimate reality or the really real and in that way is different from the ordinary experiences we have while knocking about the world. And once that feature of revelatory experience is dropped, the idea at the very center of Tillich’s theology is undermined.

4. Revelatory experiences, on Tillich’s view, naturally express themselves in myth and symbol or, as he also says, give rise to “theoretical interpretations” of these experiences. Moreover, some of these mythical expressions (or theoretical interpretations) are “more adequate” (or “truer”) than others. What it is for such an expression (or interpretation) to be more adequate (or truer) than another I have discussed above. Tillich also holds that revelatory experiences naturally express themselves in codes of conduct; that is, they give rise to “practical” as well as “theoretical” interpretations.¹²⁶ This view is also problematic. Parallel to the problem of understanding what the adequacy of a theoretical interpretation of a revelatory experience amounts to for Tillich is that of saying what it is for a practical interpretation of such an experience to be adequate.

It’s clear, I think, that much of what Tillich says about how revelatory experience bears upon the moral life is not relevant to this problem. (Nor I might add, is it especially plausible—at least if we focus on what I spoke of earlier as the paradigmatic revelatory experience.) He says, for example, (a) that revelatory experience lies behind our awareness of “the unconditional validity of the moral imperative,”¹²⁷ as well as (b) the “seriousness” with which we take this imperative.¹²⁸ It also generates (c) “the

courage to judge the particular"¹²⁹—that is, make moral judgments in particular cases—a necessary trait given the possibility (and presumably one's awareness of the possibility) that one can always go awry in such judgments as a result of "misconceiving the situation."¹³⁰ And (d) it gives rise to a certain freedom from the kind of "hatred" for the demands morality makes of us.¹³¹ But none of this, obviously, provides an answer to the question of what it is that makes a "practical interpretation" of a revelatory experience adequate to that experience. For all of (a)-(d) could be true of individuals whose "interpretations" of the practical import of their revelatory experiences were widely divergent. One interpretation, for example, might imply the (prima facie) wrongness of (i) first trimester abortion in virtually every case, (ii) the institution of capital punishment in a legal system with the general structure of the one current in the United States today, (iii) failing to make sacrifices to help those in need or jeopardy that are virtually as great as the costs they will bear if not aided. Another might contain principles that (i*) sanction first trimester abortion in all cases, (ii*) condone capital punishment as it exists in the United States today, and (iii*) always permit failures to come to the aid of others when the cost of doing so carries a serious risk to or sacrifice of the well-being of him or her who has the power to help.

What, then, is Tillich's solution to the problem at issue? So far as I can see, it consists in holding that a practical interpretation is adequate just in case the norms or principles of conduct it involves are not taken as binding in all situations; or, in other words, that it include a caveat to the effect that any of the norms or principles of conduct it involves can, and under certain circumstances will, entail incorrect moral judgments in concrete situations. Here are some of the relevant passages:

The Spirit judges all commandments.¹³²

Revelation is not informative, and it is certainly not informative about ethical rules or norms. All the ethical material, for example, of the Old and New Testaments, is open to ethical criticism¹³³

The Spirit does not produce new and more refined ... commandments.¹³⁴

... the moral law ... is transcended in its form as law.¹³⁵

... all ethical contents [exhibit] historical relativity.¹³⁶

[One goes wrong] to elevate any moral content [i.e., any moral principle or abstract norm] ... to unconditional validity....¹³⁷

The wisdom of the ages and the ethical expressions of the past (including revelatory experiences) [give] an overwhelming significance to the formulated ethical norms, but it does not give them unconditional validity.¹³⁸

Under the impact of the prophetic criticism [i.e., the criticism revelatory experience generates] moral laws change their meaning or are abrogated altogether.¹³⁹

Adequacy, then, as regards practical interpretations of revelatory experience is similar in an important respect to adequacy as regards theoretical interpretations. The latter are (most?) adequate, Tillich suggests (in part), when they are, as I have put it, "self-breaking." That is, when the interpretations are such that to accept them is to see that they are not literally true. Practical interpretations, he seems to say, are adequate just in case they involve an analogous feature. To accept such an interpretation is to see that it will not yield correct moral judgments in all situations—and, indeed, perhaps in (virtually) none.¹⁴⁰ At any rate, this is, I think, a plausible way of taking some of Tillich's words that bear on the problem in question.

What is problematic about all of this? In my judgment, the idea that revelatory experiences give rise to codes of conduct—and, in this sense, to practical interpretations—in the first place. To be sure, if Tillich were able to make the case that revelatory experience is both ubiquitous and extremely various, ranging from the paradigm experiences which Otto sought to clarify to experiences of great to more or less mild seriousness about threats to one's job, receding hair, or the condition of the paint on one's 10-year-old Volvo 240, then it would be easy to hold that at least some revelatory experiences lie behind and contribute to the development of codes of conduct. But I have argued above that going along this path raises serious problems for Tillich's theology. But if he takes revelatory experiences to be the very special experiences he describes in the section of his *Systematic Theology* alluded to above, drawing on Otto's discussion in *The Idea of the Holy*,¹⁴¹ as I have suggested he should, then the idea he has that such experiences have "practical interpretations" stands in need of defense—defense which, I believe, he would be hard-pressed to provide.

A better path for him to have followed here, I think, is the path Schleiermacher takes in the *Reden*. Concerning "piety" (or "faith") understood as the state a religious person is in qua religious or the state he speaks of in *The Christian Faith*¹⁴² as "God-consciousness," Schleiermacher writes:

... piety and morality ... are two different functions of one and the same life. But while man does nothing from religion, he should do everything with religion. Uninterruptedly, like a sacred music, the religious feelings should accompany his active life.¹⁴³

Thus, instead of holding that revelatory experience is susceptible of "practical interpretation" or naturally issues in a code (or codes) of conduct, Tillich would have done better to think of morality as an aspect of human life that is quite independent of the religiosity which is directly rooted in revelatory experience and to hold that the impact of revelatory experience upon the subject's sense of right conduct and actual behavior

is analogous to the impact (if any) that the presence of the choral movement of Beethoven's Ninth running through his or her mind might have. Such a position would clearly avoid the difficulty noted, and in a way that would carry a good deal of plausibility. Why, after all, should an experience of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinosum*—to use Otto's expression—play any role at all in making clear whether first trimester abortions, the institution of capital punishment, or using fatal force against an innocent aggressor in defense of a third party are morally legitimate? Moreover, the same should, I think, be said in connection with such practical questions as what one should do with one's life, which Tillich also thinks is (or can be) "answered" by revelatory experience.¹⁴⁴

5. Yet another problem is posed for Tillich by what he says about God. I have drawn attention above to the fact that, for Tillich, the name 'God'—at least in its central use—designates that which is (allegedly) revealed in revelatory experience and alternatively referred to as "the infinite," "the eternal," "the absolute," "the really real," "ultimate reality," and the "object" of our "ultimate concern." Since what is revealed in revelatory experience is ineffable, he also holds that there are no literally true statements about God.¹⁴⁵

The problem I want finally to highlight arises from this idea that nothing can be said of God that is literally true. It can be expressed by the following line of thought. Assume it is correct that there are no literally true statements about God. Then consider both of the following possible cases: (i) the case in which God is not distinct from (is strictly identical with) the world and (ii) the case in which God *is* distinct from (is *not* strictly identical with) the world. (Here 'the world' refers to the aggregate of finite things and events.) Suppose (i) obtains. Then it will obviously be false that there are no literally true statements about God. After all, it is literally true, for example, that the world is spatial and temporal, contains events that are causally related, contains a large number of rational agents, as well as many non-rational animals and plants, and so on. So if God just is the world, there will be countless literally true statements about God. Now suppose case (ii) obtains, that God is not strictly identical with the aggregate of finite things and events, that God is (in some sense) other than or more than the world. If this case obtains, then it will also be true that there are literally true statements about God. It will be literally true, for example, that God is not strictly identical with the world. Also, how could it fail to be the case that there were countless literally true statements about the relations of various parts of the world to this "object" that is not identical with the world? In short, if we assume that there are no literally true statements about God, we find that it can't be true that either case (i) obtains or that case (ii) obtains. But these cases exhaust the possibilities. Hence, it must be false that there are no literally true statements about God.¹⁴⁶

Tillich might respond to this problem by simply denying that finite things—and hence, presumably, the aggregate of finite things scattered around in space and time—are real; anyhow, that they are *fully* or *really* real. He does, after all, speak of God as the really real. And he says that

every finite thing is a mixture of being and non-being, a claim he explains by saying that everything finite "is being in the process of coming from and going toward nonbeing."¹⁴⁷ He also speaks of "finitude" as "being, limited by nonbeing,"¹⁴⁸ where "nonbeing" is what "appears as the 'not yet' of being and the 'no more' of being"¹⁴⁹ and as that which "confronts that which is [something] with a definite end (*finis*)."¹⁵⁰

Even if we could make sense of these ways of talking—and I have serious doubts about this—they hardly yield a happy solution to the problem. For to hold that the world is not "really real" or is, in some sense, mixed with (full of?) nonbeing is not, it seems, to hold that the world's existence is an illusion. But it's this full-blown non-existence (or non-reality) claim that Tillich needs to solve the problem along these lines. Otherwise, the argument will obviously go through in a slightly modified form and the problem will still be there.

Unfortunately, to bite the bullet and insist that the world's existence is in the same boat with the pink rats "seen" by those suffering from delirium tremens—as is done in the Vedantist tradition (by Shankara, for example)—does not solve the problem in a way that is very attractive, either. It shows too great a lack of that "robust sense of reality" which is part and parcel of common sense. And how could the world of finite things be an illusion if it's an illusion that anyone is under the illusion that there is such a world of finite things?¹⁵¹

Another solution to the problem—equally as radical, in my judgment—would be to relinquish the principle of the indiscernibility of identicals which is appealed to implicitly at several points in the argument that gives rise to the problem. But to hold that *a* can be the very same thing as *b* even though something is true of *a* that is not true of *b* is to hold that one thing can both have and lack some feature at the same time and in the same respect. And to give up this is to give up rational thought altogether.

In view of these considerations, it might be thought that the only alternative for Tillich is to give up the ineffability doctrine—at least in the form in which he embraces it. And it might be said on behalf of this approach that there's no alternative to it anyway since obvious contradictions result if it isn't given up—as has often been pointed out.¹⁵² It's a logical truth after all that, for any property whatever and any referential expression, if the referential expression refers, what it refers to either possesses the property or it possesses its complement. Also, if God is what is revealed in revelatory experience, why isn't it literally true of God that He is revealed in revelatory experience? Again, if 'God' and 'ultimate reality' refer to the same thing, why isn't it literally true of God that He has the property of being identical with ultimate reality?

I suspect Tillich would be reluctant to embrace this way out, despite the necessity of modifying his "no literal truths about God" claim to avoid paradox. That is, even if he were to modify his ineffability thesis to avoid difficulties of the kind just mentioned, he wouldn't, I suspect, be willing to retract it to any extent that would avoid the problem altogether. The conception of revelatory experience that gives rise to the ineffability thesis is too central in his thought for that.

The solution that is most in line with what is central to Tillich's position, it seems to me, is one that simply concedes that his ways of talking about God and the world do not make sense, even though they are the ways that best express the character of revelatory experience. They are the ways that will seem right to those who have had revelatory experience, even though when we take the words in a natural way and think through their implications we see that nothing can be made of them.

Some may feel that a solution of this kind throws out the baby with the bath water, but in mitigation of this worry one might point out that a thinker who is far from being an enemy of religion and whom many hold to be, if not the first philosopher of the age, at least in the class of those who are the most promising candidates for such a status, namely, Wittgenstein, held a view in the late 20s and early 30s not unlike this. Here are two of the relevant passages:

... when we speak of God and that he sees everything and when we kneel and pray to him all our terms and actions seem to be parts of a great and elaborate allegory which represents him as a human being of great power whose grace we try to win, etc., etc.... Thus in ... religious language we seem constantly to be using similes. But a simile must be a simile for *something*. And if I can describe a fact by means of a simile I must also be able to drop the simile and to describe the facts without it. Now in our case [i.e., the religious case] as soon as we try to drop the simile and simply to state the facts which stand behind it, we find that there are no such facts. And so, what at first appeared to be a simile now seems to be mere nonsense My whole tendency and I believe the tendency of all men who have ever tried to write or talk ... Religion was to run against the boundaries of language. This running against the walls of our cage is perfectly, absolutely hopeless.¹⁵³

Is speech essential for religion? I can quite well imagine a religion in which there are no doctrines, and hence nothing is said. Obviously the essence of religion can have nothing to do with the fact that speech occurs—or rather: if speech does occur, this itself is a component of religious behavior and not a theory. Therefore nothing turns on whether the words are true, false, or *nonsensical*.¹⁵⁴

V

My aim in this essay has been to do three things. First, I have tried to say what it is about Tillich's work that has made it attractive to a wide audience, despite the obscurity of so much of it. Second, I have endeavored to state as clearly as possible what I believe to be the central elements of his theological position. And, third, I have sought to present a few of the questions and problems to which his theology gives rise, and to suggest how they might be addressed with the least damage to the central thrust of his thought.

The upshot of the discussion is that at least most of these problems

can be dealt with in a relatively happy way from the standpoint of someone sympathetic either with Tillich's position and concerned to salvage as much as possible. Whether Tillich himself would be satisfied with the responses I have suggested is, of course, far from clear. He does report having once said to a Logical Positivist that he "would like him to attend my lectures and to raise a finger if something is said that lacks rationality."¹⁵⁵ This suggests that he thought his words would always strike an unprejudiced mind as thoroughly reasonable. If, as I hope, my preferred responses to the questions and problems I have raised are responses that make Tillich's views more reasonable than any alternative, then the report in question provides at least some evidence that Tillich himself would have found these responses congenial.

(I should perhaps note that he also reports that the philosopher in question refused the invitation on the ground that his finger would have to be raised all the time.)¹⁵⁶

University of Washington

NOTES

1. James Luther Adams, Wilhelm Pauck, and Roger Shinn (eds.), *The Thought of Paul Tillich* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1985), p. 7

2. "Pages from the History of the Association," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 60 (January, 1987), p. 510. On p. 185 of Wilhelm and Marian Pauck, *Paul Tillich: His Life and Thought*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976), the paper Tillich read which Moore found so unintelligible is said to have been on "Existentialist Philosophy."

3. To cite but one of countless possible examples, in ST1, 188f. Tillich introduces but feels no need whatever to explain what he speaks of as "the concept of dialectical nonbeing." (The key to the abbreviations I employ when referring to works by Tillich is given in the Abbreviations and References at the end of the paper.)

4. On the unusual language Tillich employs in his apologetic work, see the end of section III below.

5. See ST1, 18, 109ff., and 130; TC, 24; and DF, 85.

6. See DF, 31 and 33; PE, xxi, 86, and 163; ST3, 131.

7. See ST1, 59ff. and 151.

8. The expression is Frederick Buechner's.

9. See ST1, 252 and 283f.; ST2, 6, 29, and 142; ST3, 418f.; DF, 50ff.; and TC, 62.

10. See ST2, 44-78; ST3, 228-243; TC, 202ff.; SF, chap. 14; EN, chaps. 4 and 7; and CB, chap. 2.

11. See ST3, 266ff.; and KG, 191.

12. See NB, chaps. 7 and 20; SF, chaps. 5 and 21; EN, chap. 7; CB, 40ff.; and TC, 9.

13. See SA, 81f.; ST1, 113; and BR, 6.

14. See ST1, 132 and ST2, 13f.

15. See ST1, 108.
16. PE, 215f. and ST1, 101.
17. SA, 127.
18. PE, 216.
19. Ibid. See also ST1, 132.
20. ST1, 109.
21. Ibid.
22. ST2, 10 and *passim*.
23. See ST1, 109 and 239.
24. See ST1, 189ff.
25. See TC, 5; ST1, 205; ST2, 236; and DF, 47.
26. PE, 186ff.
27. TC, 7ff. and 59.
28. RS, 316.
29. Tillich, admittedly, seems to suggest that he *does* hold a correspondence theory when he says that though "anything one knows about a finite thing cannot be applied to God," nonetheless it's also the case that "whatever one knows about a finite thing one knows about God" (ST2, 9; see also AR, 379f.) His thought here is that it's true not only that nothing one says of God is literally true—but see here note 37 below—but also that, since religious symbols "participate in the reality which is symbolized," (ST2,9) there is an analogy between what is said with what is the case. (As he puts it at ST1, 240, "the *analogia entis* gives us our only justification of [sic] speaking at all about God.") The reason I downplay this theme in Tillich's epistemological thought is that I take it to be an error for the reasons given by Wittgenstein and presented below on pp. 17f. and 30.
30. DF, 95.
31. DF, 96f.
32. DF, 97. The basis for this way of construing aliveness is only hinted at in DF. (There Tillich speaks of accounts that are alive creating "reply, action, communication" (DF, 96).) Elsewhere, at many points, the idea he seems to have in mind is the idea I have suggested. See, for example, TC, 59; PE, xxiii; MJ, 5; UC, 96; ST1, 157ff.; ST3, 252ff., and the account of theology in the Introduction to ST1.
33. ST1, 80f. and 148f.
34. DF, 97f.
35. DF, 50.
36. ST1, 241.
37. He frequently insists that there is one non-symbolic statement about God, namely, that God is being-itself (or the Absolute)—see RI, 379 and ST1, 239. But in ST2 he implies that all this means is that "everything we say about God is symbolic." (He asks whether there is "a point at which a non-symbolic assertion about God must be made." And he answers that "there is such a point, namely, the statement [sic] that everything we say about God is symbolic." [9])
38. As I suggested above, Tillich does say somewhat different things about the truth of symbolic or mythological accounts here and there. In TC, for example, he says that symbols "can only die if the situation in which they have been created has passed" (TC, 65). The symbol of the Holy Virgin

has died, he suggests, in part because "the ascetic element which is implicit in the glorification of virginity" no longer occupies a prominent role in our culture (*ibid.*). Again, in RS, he says "the truth of a symbol depends on its inner necessity for the symbol-creating consciousness. Doubts concerning its truth show a change in mentality..." (RS, 316). (Whether he is making a different point here is not perfectly clear, of course.) (See also, in this connection, ST1, 240; MJ, 10f.; BR, 22ff.; and KG, 195.)

39. ST1, 61f.

40. See PE, 215f. "The really real," Tillich writes, "is what limits me. There are two powers in the whole of our experience which do not admit of an attempt to remove them, the unconditional and 'the other', i.e., the other human being. They are united in their resistance against me, in their manifestation of the really real. The unconditional could be an illusion if it did not appear through the conditional demand of the other *person* to acknowledge him as a person. And, conversely, 'the other', if he did not demand an *unconditional* acknowledgment of his personal dignity, could be used as a tool for my purposes; as a consequence he would lose his power of resistance and his ultimate reality. The unity of the personal and the unconditional... is the manifestation of the really real, *for it resists absolutely any attempt to be dissolved into subjectivity*. (PE, 215; emphasis his except for that in the last sentence.) (See also ST1, 132.)

41. UC, 44.

42. ST1, 110 and UC, 24 and 28.

43. UC, 7.

44. Theodore G. Tappert (ed.), *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), p. 365. (Quoted in Schubert Ogden, *The Reality of God* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1964), p. 185.)

45. ST1, 190.

46. ST2, 6 and TC, 5.

47. See ST2, 142.

48. See ST1, 192.

49. F. Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman (New York: Harper & Brothers, publishers, 1958), p. 116.

50. *Ibid.*

51. See ST2, 152 and 164; ST3, 142; and HT, 524.

52. ST1, 238ff.

53. ST2, 118ff.

54. ST2, 44ff.

55. ST3, 111ff. and 162ff.

56. ST3, 406ff.

57. ST3, 356ff. and ST1, 144.

58. ST3, 409ff.

59. ST2, 29.

60. ST2, 39.

61. ST2, 118.

62. ST2, 120.

63. ST2, 158.

64. ST3, 180 and 245.

65. ST2, 111.

66. ST2, 97 and UC, 76.

67. UC, 76.

68. His use of the essence/existence distinction is one exception. For part of what he has in mind is the distinction these terms express in the Aristotelian tradition, as he construes this tradition. See, for example, ST1, 202ff.

69. See, for example, ST2, 9 and the references in endnote 70.

70. ST3, 422; AR, 380; MJ, 7; and UC, 46.

71. See here notes 36 and 29.

72. This follows from the semantic doctrine noted above, the doctrine that holds that the theses (a) that reality is not reducible to the system of finite things and (b) that nothing can be said about what more there is that is literally true will be intelligible only to those who accept these theses.

73. ST1, 240.

74. UC, 96.

75. DF, 95 and MJ, 5.

76. UC, 97f.

77. MJ, 5.

78. UC, 96.

79. Sometimes Tillich suggests that his interpretations or reinterpretations of traditional Christian symbols are superior because they "answer" (or better "answer") the existential questions that give expression to "the existential situation" of modern man. (See, for example, ST1, 47ff. and 59ff. and *passim*.) But no evidence is provided for thinking they are superior in this way. Furthermore, it's not clear that the current "existential situation" is in any significant way different from what the human condition has always been. Certainly, the analysis of the existential situation Tillich provides in chap. 2 of CB provides no basis for thinking it is.

80. ST1, 62f.

81. I say 'quasi-pragmatic' because satisfaction of the aliveness criterion for the adequacy of a symbolic or mythological expression of revelatory experience is not to be understood, for Tillich, by reference simply to the "vital benefits" that flow from "accepting" such symbols or myths, to use James's term. There is an irreducible cognitive element in the "benefits" that accrue, from Tillich's point of view, even though the "knowing" that such "true" symbols engender remains ineluctably ineffable.

82. See, for example, G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. III, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson, and J. M. Stewart (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 359ff. and *passim*; also *The Logic of Hegel*, 2nd ed., trans. William Wallace (London: Oxford University Press, 1892), chap. 1—especially pp. 3-9.

83. ST1, 284.

84. At least on one of the clearest accounts he gives.

85. See ST3, 286 and WR, 67.

86. See section IV, 3 below.

87. PE, 186.

88. ST1, 37 and 227; DF, 28f.

89. DF, 97f. For some reason that remains obscure, Tillich thinks this feature is present only in (or perhaps most clearly in) *Protestant* Christianity.

90. ST2, 47; ST3, 130 and 242; PE, 78, 163, and 212.

91. ST1, 110.

92. Ibid.

93. ST1, 116.

94. PE, 78.

95. SF, 100.

96. Ibid.

97. ST3, 231ff.

98. NB, 160.

99. ST1, 239f.

100. See also in this connection the first passage from Wittgenstein quoted at the end of section IV.

101. This idea derives from Kendall Walton, "Fearing Fictions," *Journal of Philosophy*, 75 (1978), especially sections III-VII. Cf. also my "The Hiddenness of God and Barmecidal God Surrogates," *Journal of Philosophy*, 57 (1960), pp. 705ff.

102. See ST2, Part III, section II: "The Reality of the Christ."

103. ST1, 139.

104. UC, 44.

105. Ibid.; see also DF, 100f.

106. UC, 27.

107. UC, 28.

108. UC, 20; emphasis his.

109. Ibid.

110. ST1, 159.

111. ST1, 109.

112. Ibid.

113. ST1, 113.

114. Ibid.

115. Ibid.

116. Ibid.

117. ST1, 116.

118. Ibid.

119. ST1, 146.

120. ST1, 116.

121. ST1, 186ff.

122. DF, 100f.

123. UC, 27f.

124. PE, xvii.

125. DF, 106f.

126. ST1, 113 and SA, 131.

127. ST3, 272.

128. ST3, 161.

129. ST3, 279.

130. ST3, 274.

131. Ibid.

132. ST3, 268.

133. Ibid.

134. Ibid.

- 135. ST3, 272.
- 136. Ibid.
- 137. ST3, 273.
- 138. Ibid.
- 139. Ibid.
- 140. SA, 109f.
- 141. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 2d.ed., trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1950).
- 142. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 2d ed., eds. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1928), pp. 17, 47, 55, and *passim*.
- 143. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), p. 59.
- 144. ST3, 270.
- 145. See note 37.
- 146. This line of thought is similar to one presented in W. T. Stace, *Time and Eternity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), chap. 5.
- 147. ST1, 189.
- 148. Ibid.
- 149. Ibid.
- 150. Ibid.; emphasis his.
- 151. Nor is Tillich at all attracted to this line. See, for example, ST3, 350ff.
- 152. See, for example, William Alston, "Ineffability," *The Philosophical Review*, 65 (1956).
- 153. Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Lecture on Ethics," *The Philosophical Review*, 74 (1965), p. 12.
- 154. Friedrich Waismann, "Notes on Talks with Wittgenstein," *The Philosophical Review*, 74 (1965), p. 16 (emphasis mine).
- 155. RI, 375.
- 156. Ibid.

ABBREVIATIONS AND REFERENCES TO WORKS BY TILlich

- AR "Autobiographical Reflections of Paul Tillich," in *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, 2d ed., ed. C. Kegley (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1982).
- BR *Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955).
- CB *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952).
- DF *The Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957).
- EN *The Eternal Now* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956).
- HT *The History of Christian Thought*, ed. Carl Braaten (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967-68).
- KG "Religion and the Knowledge of God," *The Christian Scholar*, XXXVI-II (1955).

- MJ "The Meaning and Justification of Religious Symbols," in *Religious Experience and Truth*, ed. Sidney Hook (New York: New York University Press, 1961).
- NB *The New Being* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955).
- PE *The Protestant Era*, trans. James Luther Adams (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948).
- RI "Reply to Interpretation and Criticism," in *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, 2d ed., ed. C. Kegley (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1982).
- RS "The Religious Symbol," in *Religious Experience and Truth*, ed. Sidney Hook (New York: New York University Press, 1961).
- SA *My Search for Absolutes* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967).
- SF *The Shaking of the Foundations* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955).
- ST1 *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).
- ST2 *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2: *Existence and the Christ* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).
- ST3 *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3: *Life and the Spirit; History and the Kingdom of God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).
- TC *Theology of Culture*, ed. Robert C. Kimball (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).
- UC *Ultimate Concern: Tillich in Dialogue*, ed. D. Mackenzie Brown (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1965).
- WR *Christianity and the Encounters of the World Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963).