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**Contemporary Dilemmas and Radical Defences**

Models of the Church  
in the  
Theologies  
of  
Paul Tillich  
(1886–1965)  
and  
Juan Luis Segundo  
(1925–1998)

.....

Thesis submitted to the Department of Classics and Religious Studies  
of the University of Ottawa  
in January, 2000  
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.....

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## **Ideas, Time and Contingencies**

### **Four Assertions in Defence of the Church in Spite of its Dilemmas**

A new Reformation is in full progress. It is a re-formation; but whether its issue be fortunate or unfortunate depends largely on the actions of comparatively few men, and notably upon the leaders of the protestant clergy [...]

The history of religion is the history of the countless generations required for interest to attach itself to profound ideas [...]

The religious spirit is always in process of being explained away, distorted, buried. Yet since the travel of mankind toward civilization, it is always there. The task of Theology is to show how the World is founded on something beyond mere transient fact, and how it issues in something beyond the perishing of occasions.

**Alfred North Whitehead**  
*Adventures of Ideas, 1933*

La concrétisation post-protestante du christianisme sera un 'catholicisme évangélique', c'est à dire une Église qui a le pouvoir d'intégrer les masses au moyen d'une autorité reconnue, de symboles efficaces de d'actes sacramentels, mais tout cela étant soumis a la critique du principe protestant.

**Paul Tillich**  
*La Fin de l'Ère Protestante, 1937*

Religious traditions are the most conservative of all traditions, but below the surface the changes are very profound. It is as if the dynamic structure of the religious life of mankind has changed under the skin.

**Paul Tillich**

*The Encounter of Religions and Quasi-Religions, 19*hus if it used the right approach a Church that is numerically universal could likewise become a leaven of light and critical judgement at the same time--though these latter qualities are restricted to minorities today, thanks to the effort they expend.

**Juan Luis Segundo**  
*Liberation of Theology, 1976*

(These quotations are further identified on page 233 in the Bibliography)

## Abstract

Paul Tillich and Juan Luis Segundo have separately advocated changes in Christian thinking which, if accepted, would gradually develop new models of the Church, both in the perception of its members and of society generally. At the level of theological revision of belief the proposals vary considerably. Tillich elaborated a systematic and philosophical theology containing a synthesis of elements both of contemporary and of traditional Christian thought. His theology presented a radical challenge to traditional theism. His concept of the Church, however, as the institutional and cultural manifestation of religious meaning retained an emphasis on sacramentality and mission in society intended to ensure continuity of what he saw as a sacred community. At the same time he extended the concept and intuition of such a community within the Church to a latent one outside the institution. After an earlier emphasis on religious socialism as part of the mission of the Church he turned to concern for what has been called the ontological security of the individual in the face of deep anxiety.

Segundo has insisted on the legitimacy of what he calls the liberation of dogma by new methods of interpretation enabling the Church to respond to the most urgent needs of contemporary society. In company with other liberation theologians he has identified those needs as release from the alienation and injustice created by the powerful economic structures of capitalism. Unlike most other liberation theologians he is convinced that such change will come about so far as the Church is concerned only through the efforts of a minority vanguard working within the Church in order to change the mentality of Church leaders with respect to its obligation to advance the Kingdom of God in history. He has not presented an alternative theological system so much as he has insisted that Scriptural warranty and Christian experience point to that obligation and that secular ideologies can be used as a means to fulfil that obligation.

The influence which such trends in theology could exert on the churches would probably be apparent in the following ways: (1) less emphasis on formal acceptance of inherited creeds as a condition of membership; (2) acceptance of pluralism in theological analysis and expression; (3) a continuing ecumenical convergence; (4) erosion of claims to divine authority inherent in Church and Scripture but with maintenance of firm institutional governance; (5) openness to processes of selective secularization with regard to contemporary social issues in the field of human rights for example; (6) a considerably increased role for the laity with an emphasis on their continuing education and (7) an insistence on the obligation to judge social and political issues combined with avoidance of a role as a direct political agent. Since this is an analysis of the eventual impact of ideas on inherited bodies of thought and on the functioning of an institution, the points listed above are conjectural. On the basis of a pre-supposition that the current *malaise* within the institution has its roots in anxiety about adaptation within modern and secular culture, the principal contribution of these two theologians is to make the point that the creedal and theological superstructure can change without undermining the stability and vitality of the Church.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

The statements made over four decades in the past century by Alfred North Whitehead, Paul Tillich and Juan Luis Segundo are provocative in two senses. Each asserts that future prospects for religion are hopeful, even within the steadily eroding theological and institutional formulations of Christianity. The philosophical and theological revisionism proclaimed or inherent in their ideas has, paradoxically, however, contributed significantly to that shaking of the foundations which has create profound dilemmas of choice for the Church.

These statements are provocative in a second sense, and introductory to the themes of this thesis. What *are* the models of a regenerated Church, with Tillich's "dynamic structure" and Segundo's "leaven of light and critical judgment" advocated or envisaged by these two influential theologians? The unpredictable pace of the transformation of ideas in history, the tensions between conflicting impulses towards change and continuity, and the contingencies of human response all indicate that no precise models can be offered. In both cases, it is the prophetic intuition about the desirable and the possible which is illuminating.

The principal contention of this dissertation is twofold. The revisionist proposals are radical both in relation to religious origins and fundamentals, and in relation to the impact on traditional concepts and institutions. In addressing fundamentals, however, both theologians have defined and defended the essential truths of which, in the case of one world religion, the Church is the bearer. In this sense, their advocacy and defence have a radical base. They have made their own response to the secularist modernity which has so alarmed, and in some cases paralyzed, the traditionalist.

### *Contemporary Situation*

In recent years one of the major themes in religious studies has been the marked decline in the institutional strength and influence of Christian churches. The decline has not been an even one between regions and denominations and it has occasionally been reversed. As a societal and religious phenomenon it has been analyzed from a variety of perspectives within the social sciences and, of course, by theologians with respect to the content of belief and faith held by the churches. Except in the situations in which churches have been attacked directly by totalitarian regimes for ideological reasons, the basic reason for the decline seems to be the difficulty experienced by church members in reconciling traditional belief and faith with increasingly secularized culture in Western societies. I refer to contemporary dilemmas because there are profound difficulties of choice between accommodation to that culture and rejection of it, between maintaining an inherited creedal and theological superstructure or accepting the need for revision. One option requires taking the risks of an attempt to shape society in a new mold. The opposing option involves the search for comfort in a pious hope of salvation behind traditional walls. Some of the most acute issues require decisions about adhering to a fixed moral code said to have a Scriptural mandate or considering new bases for ethical criteria.

What do theologians, who are expected to provide long-term and reflective counsel to church leaders, think about these dilemmas? The answers are as diverse as attitudes among the clergy and laity. There would be little point in putting this question to theologians who do not perceive dilemmas within the Church but attribute them to the secularists outside. For the purposes of this analytical project within the field of religious studies, the question has been put rather to two theologians of this past century who have been somewhere on the boundary lines between the religious and the secular cultures and who are prepared to admit dilemmas. The question raised here with respect to dilemmas

within the Church is not basically a theological one about the nature of divinity for example but rather a sociological one about the difficulties of choice and the future prospects of an institution which still commands allegiance from a substantial part of humanity. The question is about a model for the Church which would help to resolve what the theologians in question perceive as the difficulties.

The answers to that question in the theologies of Paul Tillich and Juan Luis Segundo lie in a rather surprising combination, already noted, of radical revision at the level of the creedal and theological superstructure, with a coherent defence of fundamentals and significant, but not dramatic, change in the actual shape and operations of the institution. The two theologies offer the counsel of selective secularization, combined with confidence in the institution. For that reason, if influential, they would probably help considerably to resolve dilemmas of the type mentioned.

#### *Secularization*

In those societies in which the Church has had an important, even dominant, institutional presence for centuries defining its nature and purpose in general terms has been easy. Members, adherents, sceptics and opponents could at least agree on what they accepted, supported or rejected. Beyond general terms, of course, questions about what had to be believed as a condition of membership and salvation, and about the ethical obligations of membership, were less well understood by the mass of people. As for actions by the Church in controversial matters involving society generally and those holding political power, decisions have had to be made by leaders claiming some form of apostolic succession and legitimacy. The Church has been an institution within society but separate from and, in some respects, parallel to the institutions and organizations representing and generally shaping a culture. It has represented a different dimension and perception of human reality.

Within that traditional and broad concept of the Church, beliefs about its nature and purpose in particular societies and times have varied considerably. One obvious contrast in models is a familiar one. A sectarian community of the elect, called forth for salvation, is opposed to a broad assembly of the people for whom the Church provides spiritual nurture and admonition at a level higher than that of the secular state, but equally comprehensive in scope. For the sectarian community still, the image is that of the ark and the purpose is escape. In the traditional ecclesial model of the Church in Christendom the image, whether of palace or temple, was one appropriate to a centre of power. The rulers in the spiritual realm were, in principle, benevolent but, allied with the princes, wielded power in the ordering of society as mentors and judges. Under the impact of modern skepticism this latter model has been reduced, both in the perception of those outside and in the psychology of those inside, to that of a fortress holding out against an increasingly menacing secular culture.

The intellectual rebels of the Enlightenment period initiated those processes of change in Western society which we identify very generally as secularization and modernization, characterized mostly by critical and scientific rationalism. Until that time the Christianity represented by the churches had no significant religious rivals within that society. Heresy, schism and confessional splits emerged from different interpretations of some central elements in a system of revealed and transcendent truth. By the early twentieth century the disparate forces of secular humanism, eclectic and philosophical spirituality, and logical positivism could scarcely be called a “religious” rival to Christianity, least of all in an institutional sense as alternatives to the Church. They did, however, challenge and steadily undermine the system of belief on which the Church as a central institutional element in society depended.

The principal challenge to the Church and its system of belief has not been that of an alternative religious system and its institutions. Secular culture in Western societies

has had such a substantial and negative impact on the Christian system because it has both incorporated elements of that system and posed essentially philosophical questions about the truth and relevance of other elements which orthodox Christianity found difficult to answer. Even attempts at a new synthesis between an inherited religious system and the dynamic elements in an increasingly autonomous culture, particularly in the liberal Protestantism of the nineteenth century, underestimated the extent of the gap which had opened up between them. Within that secular culture the typical prediction seemed to be that such a synthesis was impossible.

Max Weber observed the social power of the churches in the United States early in the century but concluded that “closer scrutiny revealed the steady progress of the characteristic process of ‘secularization’ to which in modern times all phenomena that originated in religious conceptions succumb”.<sup>1</sup> August Comte did not wait for the phenomena to succumb but proposed a secular religion for humanity. Ernst Troeltsch originated the study of models of the Church. For some time the followers of Weber adhered more or less to the secularization thesis, even if evidence credible to social scientists also accumulated, indicating that the religious mode of thinking and feeling might not disappear from the human scene so rapidly after all.

The expectation that religion will soon die out dies hard among the children of the Enlightenment. Bryan Wilson (1979) suggests the founders of sociology saw sociology itself as an alternative to religion. Daniel Bell (1977) remarks that during the first half of this century almost every sociological thinker expected religion to disappear from industrial society before the year 2000.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Current Debate*

Religion in general seems to have been given a certain respite in secularist conjectures about the future. Future prospects for the Christian system, however,

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<sup>1</sup> *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968, p. 307.

<sup>2</sup> Donald Heinz, “Clashing Symbols: the New Christian Right as Countermythology” in *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, Paris: C.N.R.S., Vol. 59.1, 1985, p.155.

particularly for its institutional expression and shield, the Church, are given relatively less respect. Study of these prospects within the various disciplines of the social sciences leads to conjectures about the fragmentation, shattering, demise, or erosion of Christian structures into some kind of diffused religion.<sup>3</sup> One acclaimed work indicative of a basic attitude is Marcel Gauchet's *Le désenchantement du monde*.<sup>4</sup> Christianity is commended warmly by him for the noble contribution it has made to liberal and secular humanism. Contemporary Christians are told, however, that its age as a force moulding society is over and that they will have to retreat to private piety and mysticism and not aspire to a collective voice in the great affairs of society.

Less charitable assessments of the Christian past from sociological and philosophical perspectives following a similar line with respect to disenchantment and secularization are provided by Bryan Wilson in *Religion in Sociological Perspective*<sup>5</sup> and by Roger Lapointe in *Socio-anthropologie du religieux: la religion populaire au péril de la modernité*.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the nature and strength of religious forces limiting secularism are recognized in David Martin's *A General Theory of Secularization*.<sup>7</sup> Case studies of churches in particular countries, primarily from sociological and historical standpoints with explanations or conjectures for decline or current dilemmas, have been abundant. The following are cited as examples of analyses which in one way or another certainly provide evidence of present models and a basis for assumptions about their future prospects: Reginald W. Bibby, *Fragmented Gods: the*

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<sup>3</sup> In the concluding section of the Bibliography, entitled "Church and Society" a list of relevant works read in the field of the sociology of religion and of contemporary Christian thought is provided. The titles in a number of cases indicate the judgement or the conjecture.

<sup>4</sup> Paris: Gallimard, 1985.

<sup>5</sup> Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

<sup>6</sup> Genève: Librairie Droz, 1988.

<sup>7</sup> Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978.

*Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada*; <sup>8</sup> W.E.Hewitt, ed., *The Sociology of Religion: a Canadian Focus*; <sup>9</sup> Steve Bruce, *A House Divided: Protestantism, Schism and Secularization*; <sup>10</sup> Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney, *American Mainline Religion: its Changing Shape and Future*; <sup>11</sup> Tony Campolo, *Can Mainline Denominations Make a Comeback?*<sup>12</sup>

The approach to questions of the future of Christianity and the Church in these studies is primarily a social science one, even if particular authors may be identified with a church. The terms for continuing debate on these issues have been more or less accepted by authors from within Christian positions, many of whom also advocate substantial change with the Church. The comment of Hans Küng makes that point.

The real Church is not an ideal, sacral, eternal phenomenon, floating somewhere between God and men. The real Church is rather the Church of God, composed of men, existing in the world for the world.<sup>13</sup>

From that perspective the following works address central questions about the future of Christianity and the Church with a variety of approaches: Gregory Baum, *The Social Imperative: Essays on the Critical Issues that Confront the Christian Churches*,<sup>14</sup> Johann Baptist Metz, *The Emergent Church: the Future of Christianity in a Post-Bourgeois World*;<sup>15</sup> Martin Marty, *The Modern Schism: Three Paths to the Secular*;<sup>16</sup> Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*;<sup>17</sup> Robin Gill, *Theology and Social Structure*;<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1987

<sup>9</sup> Toronto, Vancouver: Butterworths, 1993.

<sup>10</sup> London, New York: Routledge, 1993.

<sup>11</sup> London, New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers Univ. Press, 1987

<sup>12</sup> Valley Forge, Penn.: Judson Press, 1995.

<sup>13</sup> *The Church*, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1976, p. 612.

<sup>14</sup> New York: Paulist Press, 1979.

<sup>15</sup> New York: Crossroad, 1981.

<sup>16</sup> New York, Evanston, Ill.: Harper and Row, 1969,

<sup>17</sup> New York: Doubleday and Co., 1974.

Karl Rahner, *The Shape of the Church to Come*,<sup>19</sup>

The diverse approaches to the central issues of dilemmas already mentioned run the full gamut from the sociological to the theological. Questions about the perceptible shape and functioning of churches may appear to be primarily sociological but the decisive factor in change may have to be sought theologically. There are, of course, more bridges between sociological and theological discourse now than before. The approaches remain, in principle, quite separate, for good reason. Sociology is concerned with the perceptible functioning of institutions and behaviour of individuals in groups, not with judgements and demands about functioning and behaviour coming from a system of thought partially dependent on some form of transcendent illumination. Sociologists of religion, however, detect the shift in theological perspectives.<sup>20</sup>

#### *Critical Areas for Possible Change*

The general objective of the thesis has been indicated at the beginning of the chapter: that of examining the theologies of Paul Tillich and Juan Luis Segundo in order to determine their response to dilemmas of change in the Church. That objective will

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<sup>18</sup> London, Oxford: Mowbrays Publishers, 1977 .

<sup>19</sup> London: S.P.C.K, 1974.

<sup>20</sup> In this connection I note the comment of a group of sociologists of religion who reported on "The United Church in Crisis". "In seeking clues to the religion of the twenty-first century, many sociologists have misdirected their curiosity. Sensitive investigation of the United Church of Canada might well furnish them with more reliable hints of the future than may be derived from exploration of more exotic contemporary religious movements". W. E. Hewitt ed., *The Sociology of Religion: a Canadian Focus*, Toronto, Vancouver: Butterworths, 1993, p. 285. The United Church of Canada says in its Statement of Faith that it is in the "non-literal tradition". It has absorbed a good deal of liberation thinking to add to its long-standing interpretation of the social gospel. It is certainly influenced by theologies of the type represented by Paul Tillich and Juan Luis Segundo. I might justify my project as being intended to obtain a few more "reliable hints of the future" from quite logical sources.

include attention to particular and critical areas of difficulty and possible change. These areas about which conclusion will be drawn are the following ones:

- (1) Secularization: the interactions between the Church and its cultural environment;
- (2) Creeds and Theologies: revision of foundational creeds and obligatory belief as a condition of membership;
- (3) Risks of Change: attitudes towards the pace, unsettling effects and contingencies of change;
- (4) Ecumenical Convergence: the erosion of confessional lines and the by-passing of inherited controversies;
- (5) Authority in the Church: ultimate spiritual authority and the structural governance of the institution; responsibility of the laity;
- (6) Prophetic Demand and Political Limitations: the tensions between the Kingdom of God and the limitations of the political role for a religious institution in the cultural dimension of society.

After drawing conclusions about how Tillich and Segundo envisaged the nature and role of the Church under these headings I will offer my own conclusions on the theme of contemporary dilemma and radical defences.

#### *Terms in the Discussion and Choice of Theologies*

“Model” is not, of course, a completely satisfactory term when used with reference to an institution such as the Church. If understood in a normative sense to indicate an ideal form in relation to the achievement of objectives, then any theologian will point out that this sacred assembly does not expect to achieve perfection in this world. It would be presumptuous to claim, or to imply, that bringing about the Kingdom of God in its fullness was only a matter of finding the right model for the institution. If eschatological objectives were to be achieved in a mystical future, then theologians

would again point out that church-going was ended forever. There would not be anything available which we could recognize as a religious institution in the Kingdom of God.

We can think of “model” in an analytical sense as a concept, sketch, outline or blueprint of how people think and act in accordance with their sense of a function and within a structure which has been a familiar part of the Western cultural environment for a long time. The term then becomes quite helpful for at least one aspect of the following study. As guiding concepts change, so the perceptible profile with regard to thinking, acting, function and structure might also change. Approaching a religious institution in this way, at least in modern thought, is as reasonable as following the same approach with regard to a political institution such as the state. In one fundamental respect, however, a “model” in this case falls short by comparison with studies of other institutions and organizations. Ultimate concerns, objectives, and results vanish beyond the reach of the analytical net of evaluation. Impact on societies and cultures, and on individual lives, does lie, of course, within the net so far as human sciences are concerned. What might appear, however, from this latter standpoint as success for the institution or individual, could be judged failure from a strictly religious perspective.

With recognition of this limitation, “model” can serve a useful purpose. It might still be argued, of course, that since guiding concepts are expressed theologically, study of similar, compatible, or competing ecclesiologies should indicate clearly enough the essential features of the profiles of different churches. Following that argument perceptible changes in thinking, acting, function and structure in a human institution in its own cultural setting would be apparent from that study. The observation is valid up to a certain point. One could not seriously approach a theme of “models of the Church” without regard to the theology, ecclesiology and contemporary Christian thought in general which define purpose. Relying too much on general doctrine, traditional wisdom and the stated intentions of ecclesiastical authorities, however, will take the observer

only so far with regard to the actual profile, or model, of a particular branch of the Church. Ecclesiology may prescribe a shape but particular human communities within churches have their say as well.

Leonardo Boff has argued that there are really four Churches within the Roman Catholic Church: City of God, Mater et Magistra, Sacrament of Salvation and (“a new model”) a Church from the Poor. He offered his analysis in the first chapter, entitled “Models and Pastoral Practices of the Church” in his book, *Church Charism and Power*, which had a sub-title, *Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church*.<sup>21</sup> The sub-title emphasizes the point made above about general doctrine and the judgments of ecclesiastical authorities as opposed to pressures for change. These authorities, in the interests of peace in their life-times, may well wish to have stable doctrine calmly interpreted in institutional structures and practices, but they have to face rebellious theologies looming on the horizon. At the same time, those defending the exercise of institutional authority are entitled to reply that authority is indispensable, not to reject change on principle, but to manage it. Without authority to maintain the bonds of the institution it would be difficult to prevent the Church from going down self-defeating paths.

Avery Dulles, writing from within the tradition of one Church in *Models of the Church*, discusses “the use of models in Ecclesiology” and their evaluation.<sup>22</sup> He identifies the Church from separate perspectives as Institution, Mystical Communion, Sacrament, Herald, Servant and bearer of ultimate eschatological truth. They can be seen simply as different aspects of presence and purpose of one “true” Church, faithful to all the precepts of Scripture. Depending on the interpretation of such precepts, however, and the relative importance assigned to each, the consequences for structure, worship and

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<sup>21</sup> London, S.C.M. Press, pp. 2-5

<sup>22</sup> New York, Doubleday and Company, 1978, Chapter One, pp. 19-38

societal role can be very different. The history of the churches in the West since the sixteenth century provides dramatic confirmation of consequences in models. We need only think of some well-known ones: the revolutionary assembly of Thomas Münzer (precursor and secular saint for Communists in the twentieth century); the Non-conformist chapels in England; the Calvinist churches of Geneva, Holland or Edinburgh; the Anglican and Lutheran state churches and the Catholic churches still owing allegiance to St. Peter's in Rome.

Even in the ranks of the liberationist movement in Latin America now there are dissimilar visions, or models, of the Church. Gutierrez and Boff had no sooner elaborated a vision of a Church "from the poor" than Juan Luis Segundo dissented, stressing the essential role of an elitist vanguard. This contrast is not, necessarily, the same as that provided by images of a Base Community in a poor district and a Cathedral elsewhere.

Whether change occurs from re-examination of the faith from within, or from the pressure of the culture outside, there is no doubt that models of the Church keep changing. One obvious change is the ordination of women as clergy in some mainstream churches. The leaders in those churches have not found any compelling instruction in Scripture to do this. They have stated that they have not found any serious reason why they should *not* do so. There could be no more revealing testimonial to the power of one type of secularization than this example affords, and no better indication of the importance of taking some strands in contemporary theology and asking what further changes might occur in the concept of the Church.

### *Two Theologians and their Linkages*

Given the general intention to examine changing models of the Church in relation to the most obvious questions about ecclesial polity why take the writings of only two individuals? From the comments already made on models, it is clear that many diverse forces have produced, and could change concepts of a sacred assembly. Should not the

actuality, or the potentiality, of change be examined across the board in denominations, theologies, ecumenical negotiations, competing exegetical and historical assessments and other contributing factors?

The answer to that question is that one might attempt such a project, but that it would assume encyclopaedic proportions. It might end up as an immense catalogue of facts, opinions, proposals and hypotheses. It would be unreliable in indicating directions of change because it contained too much evidence and too little possibility of evaluating contemporary evidence about processes under way. As such, it would not seem to fit the purposes of a dissertation of this type, with a more limited focus on a few elements in the whole picture.

In choosing two theologians, I am attempting to understand how they deal with processes of change and with the implications of such change for the Church (or churches). Each has made a radical attack on orthodox concepts. Tillich referred scornfully to “superworld”: the supranatural, theistic, hierarchical structure of thought which, at the discretion of church leaders, could be used to legitimate dogma and to assert the presence of divinity in the institution of the Church and in Scripture. Segundo and his associates in the liberation movement accused the Roman Catholic Church of “pathologies of power” and demanded that legitimation of the capitalist ideology should end.

These attacks have been devastating enough by implication that one might assume that intentions in both cases with regard to the institution were essentially destructive. Instead, they seem to rely upon, indeed to be dependent upon, visions of a new, regenerated Church as an essential instrument in implementing their visions. Christians and others are entitled to ask, therefore, what type of institution they want to see and how it could be protected against illusions and ideological pathologies. Their

protests and assertions make what they have to say relevant to a theme of changing models in the Church.

This choice of an approach to the broader theme rests upon two assumptions. The first one is that the contributions made by Tillich and by Segundo and the Latin American liberation theologians to contemporary debate on that theme have been, and are, important and will be considered as such by future historians of Christianity and the Church. Given the study already made of these contributions, this seems to be a reasonable assumption.<sup>23</sup> Tillich's peers, friends and admirers testify that he did not really create a theological school or a reform movement, but rate him as a major philosopher-theologian because of the doors he opened and the stimulus he contributed to new thinking about the philosophy of religion and systematic Christian theology.

I have chosen one liberation theologian for particular attention for reasons which will be noted in a later chapter. My question "what kind of Church" is really put to Segundo and the liberation group generally. This group within the Church certainly constitutes a movement. It might possibly be considered eventually as a "school" because of the methodology employed. The degree of impact achieved so far in society and in the Church is harder to assess. The efforts made by the Roman Catholic Magisterium

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<sup>23</sup> I make this assumption in Tillich's case not only because of the quantity of secondary literature about him but also because of the nature and quality of tributes paid to him by Protestant and Catholic theologians, the wide public attention in the United States during his life, and the existence of centres of Tillich studies at Harvard and Laval Universities as well as Tillich Societies. I have not found a study measuring his influence so far in seminaries and in formal positions taken by churches. So far as Segundo and the other liberation theologians are concerned, I think that two Instructions from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, other critical judgements from Rome, counter-measures by conservatives, and a course of events in Latin America well documented by social scientists have earned and are earning this group a place in history, no matter what Rome may hope.

since the 1970's both to control, but to give some recognition to the arguments of the liberation movement, provide at least a negative testimonial to the importance accorded to the theological and political arguments of the increasingly assertive Latin Americans.

The second assumption is that the theologies in question, apart from advocacy and defence, provide evidence of the intellectual and political climate in Europe, North and South America from the early years of this century to the present. As suggested above, the shape of the Church has certainly been influenced by the prevailing political and cultural climate over centuries. Tillich provided what he hoped would be a synthesis capable of providing a bridge, a mediation, between Christian thought and increasingly alien and indifferent secularist critics. He was, so some other theologians pointed out, essentially "preaching to the Gentiles". Since Tillich grew up in a society in which a great many intellectuals, as well as the labour movement, had defected from the Church, and from Christianity generally, this intention is not surprising. What he offered by way of mediation and what he wrote about that context throws light on the wider picture of Church and society.

The liberation theologians were very much concerned with the immediate reality of Latin American affairs, the ideological conflicts between Marxism, conservative and authoritarian traditions, liberal democracy and military national security regimes. They found much to criticize in their studies of the history of the Church in Latin America. They did find an early bishop who dealt justly with the Indians. He became a hero for their movement. They were open to the new currents of thought in Catholicism which led to Vatican II. As Segundo reports, Marxism was standard intellectual fare at most Universities. Their basic argument, directed particularly to Catholics, was that if the Church did not take a decisive stand with respect to social injustice it would lose all credibility with the mass of the people.

Gustavo Gutierrez said that if he stood up in his pulpit in a slum in Lima and said that God was just and that the parishioners would have to accept their lot in life he would be considered the greatest fool in the world.<sup>24</sup> His situation and the crisis for the Church might be compared with that in Germany in the sixteenth century when Thomas Münzer led the peasants in a rebellion arising from his understanding of the prophetic demand. Luther, who sympathized with the peasants, could not condone the rebellion.

Liberation theology documents are political documents as well. The proclamations of these theologians and their direct involvement in political events, or in the raising of political and religious awareness in base communities, began to change the image of the Church in many parts of Latin America. The change was such that in some places the institution itself was attacked by right-wing forces and Church people were assassinated. Public image can be part of a changing model.

To these two initial assumptions about the importance and probable continuing influence of these theologians, should be added a different consideration. There are linkages and continuities between Tillich and Segundo, although they represent quite different political and cultural contexts and confessional backgrounds. They have been chosen in order to pursue some common themes about the Church in quite different settings. Segundo did express emphatic agreement with Tillich's "Protestant principle" rejecting absolute authority in the Church, as will be noted later.

Other linkages are important. Tillich as a member of the religious socialism movement, made an attempt to persuade democratic socialists in Germany to develop a religious and Christian basis for their political stance. He rejected dogmatic Marxism, particularly in the new Soviet Union. That position anticipated in a number of ways the Latin American liberation movement's insistence that Marxism offered a useful

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<sup>24</sup> He spoke at a conference at St. Paul's University at which I was present.

analytical tool but that their demand for justice in a socialist form had deep roots in Christian thinking.

As will be noted, Tillich's philosophical existentialism and Segundo's hermeneutical suspicion about orthodox interpretations of Scripture and their political implications, although dissimilar, both eroded orthodox certainties, Catholic and Protestant. The Tillichian revisionary process, involving reliance on myth and symbols in interpretation, was directed against literalism in Scripture and dogma. The liberationist tactic, paradoxically, involved a warning that, armed with the sanction of Scripture, they fully intended to liberate their society from the capitalist Pharaohs of the present time in a new Exodus. The Magnificat became a program for immediate political action.

This dramatic literalism forced the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in its 1984 *Instruction* regarding liberation theology,<sup>25</sup> to warn the Latin American theologians and the organizers of Base Communities, in cautiously chosen words, that they must not use Scripture in this way, without appropriate guidance from authorities of the Church. In other words, literalism sanctioned by the Church was correct but could otherwise be dangerous. Cardinal Ratzinger did concede that he could scarcely fault the liberation movement for turning to Scripture for guidance and that there was a good liberation theology as well as a dangerous one.

As for linkage between Tillich's "New Being" and the appeal of some liberationists for a "New Man" [sic] it is harder to establish any very credible philosophical similarity, except superficially. Transforming human nature as a theme in liberationist thinking has had a Utopian and populist appeal linked to the idea of a Church "from the poor", regenerated and egalitarian.<sup>26</sup> Segundo has been suspicious

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<sup>25</sup> *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation*, Vatican City, 1984, Chapter VI, p.10, Chapter X, p.14 and Chapter XI, p.15

<sup>26</sup> A basic theme, for example, in (1) Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, London, S.C.M. Press, 1983 (*La fuerza historico de los pobres*, Lima, Centro

enough of the masses, in the Church and outside, that he has been more concerned with the political role of an enlightened vanguard minority than with the ontological state of individuals. Tillich's "New Being" had its attraction in a quite different cultural setting, that of Americans with a developing fascination with psychology-- Freudian, Jungian or otherwise-- and sufficient neurosis to consider themselves to be in an "age of anxiety".

The basic question about the nature of the Church is focussed, in Tillich's case, on the conclusions which he was reaching after he went to the United States, and certainly by the time he completed his *Systematic Theology* two years before his death.<sup>27</sup>

The last volume contains the principal passages about the Spiritual Community. Tillich told an American audience a few years after he had arrived in New York that he had benefitted from the change to a new society in that he had overcome a "European provincialism" even in religious thought. He added that he would try to avoid an American provincialism. In view of the nature of the questions to be raised about the future of the Church, it seems important that his final judgment on this subject should be sought. In his last years he was still struggling with questions about the relevance, or irrelevance, of the Church and its message for the rest of humanity.<sup>28</sup>

Tillich was trained in theology, ordained as a Lutheran minister and criticized his own Church severely for its failure to understand the implications of Marxism and its own political responsibilities. It is still difficult to determine from his writings in Germany what he thought at that time the shape of a future Church could, or should, be. He wrote about theology and culture, about his philosophical approach to reason in a

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de Estudios, 1979 and (2) Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis; The base communities reinvent the church*, London, Collins, 1986 ( *Eclesiogénesis: As comunidades eclesiais de base reinventam a Igreja*, Petrópolis, Brazil, Editora Vozes, 1977).

<sup>27</sup> Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 3 volumes, 1951, 1957, 1963

<sup>28</sup> *The Irrelevance and the Relevance of the Christian Message*, Cleveland, Ohio, The Pilgrim Press, 1996

system of the sciences and about the prospects for a *Kairos*, a new revelation in the fullness of time, of a particularly political/religious nature. In his *Socialist Decision*, written shortly before he left Germany, which he is said to have considered his best work, there is almost no reference to the Church.<sup>29</sup> The new revelation he hoped for seemed more likely to have the Socialist Party of Germany as its bearer than to have the Church leading the way. The barbaric *Kairos* of Nazism which swept over the Weimar Republic left him even more depressed about his own Church, to the extent even of considering, for a very short time, becoming a Roman Catholic. This was more a matter, it appears, of respect for institutional power than of doctrinal conversion.

In the second phase of his career, in the United States, and in the writing of his *Systematic Theology* between 1951 and 1963, Tillich turned his attention not only to the individual and his or her anxiety of being, but to the careful articulation of Christology and ecclesiology. It seems clear that he realized that in these latter two areas he was vulnerable to the charge that while he had constructed an impressive defence of religion and spirituality, it was not clear where he stood on the Church or the central event of the Christian faith. This does not mean that earlier works are not also essential to an understanding of what he thought about church and culture. The *Spiritual Community* outlined in the last volume of his *Systematic Theology* does seem to embody the results of a long period of reflection, diverse experiences of the church itself and possibly conflicting inclinations about delineating the role of the institution.

The works of Segundo, where new elements of a model emerge within a particular Church, are more consistent and coherent in this respect. This is true of an

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<sup>29</sup> New York, Harper and Row, 1977 (*Die sozialistische Entscheidung*, 1933, see Bibliography)

early work about the community “called the church”<sup>30</sup> and then much later to his response to Cardinal Ratzinger after the 1984 *Instruction* concerning liberation theology followed by Segungo’s own “warning to the whole Church”<sup>31</sup> From his position within the Church he seems to have calculated very carefully how far he could go in theological revisionism, and in a possible confrontation with Rome, without calling seriously into question his loyalty to the Catholic Church.

*Culture, Society, Institution, Dilemma*

When these words appear in the citations from the two theologians and from others I trust that the sense in which they are used will be apparent from the context. Comments should probably be made about my own use of these words since they can be understood in various ways in different systems of thought. I believe that my use corresponds reasonably well with that of the two authors. In a passage to which reference will be made in a later chapter Tillich states that religion is the meaning of culture and culture is the form of religion. He also refers to the Church often being in conflict with society. The distinction between two levels or types of relationship is important. I think of culture as that dimension of a society in which a coherent set of values, a system of ultimate meaning, give shape and identity to that society. The institutional manifestation of any religious group, along with educational institutions, the arts, the state (insofar as its claim to legitimacy is concerned) and inherited folk wisdom and sense of identity all can claim a place in the cultural dimension. A society (or society generally) is then the collectivity, local, regional or national, with the structures and systems required for its order and physical survival. It can be identified culturally both to itself and to others.

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<sup>30</sup> *A Theology for Artisans of a New Humanity, Vol. I: The Community Called Church*, Maryknoll, N. Y., Orbis Books, 1973 (for other volumes, see Bibliography).

<sup>31</sup> *Theology and the Church; a Response to Cardinal Ratzinger and a Warning to the Whole Church*, Minneapolis, Winston Press, 1985 (see Bibliography)

The Church as a religious establishment is an institution within culture, or a cultural institution, for the reasons given. It shares institutional status with others in the sense of the permanent and formative role described. It is also an organization with its interests to defend in the functioning of society.

I would not want to ascribe to those situations in churches involving profound difficulties of choice, to which I referred at the beginning of this chapter, the full drama of the classic dilemma of navigating between Scylla and Charybdis and calculating the degree of risk posed by a rocky headland in one direction and a whirlpool in the other. Least of all would I suggest another meaning of dilemma, that of almost no choice at all in the face of superior and hostile force. Traditional connotations of dilemma are relevant, however, because opposed options with regard to change or no-change each seem to carry with them dangers as well as potential benefits. Traditional criteria by which to make a choice no longer seem reliable. The imagery of navigation and unknown seas is apt.

Although it is probably not necessary to point this out, I refer to the “Church” as the model and vision, or the common concept held by all churches, in the apostolic and catholic style of theologians. There are frequent references to “orthodoxy”. I am, of course, referring to the formal dogma of the institutions, from which Tillich and Segundo have proposed various degrees of liberation, and not to the churches which bear that name. The latter are not exempt from the revisionist criticism being examined. Although Tillich and Segundo have achieved liberation in most other respects, that does not extend usually to inclusive language.

#### *Sources of Study*

The works of Tillich supporting this analysis are listed in the Bibliography. In the case of translations into English of books or essays written in German, the German title and other details of the original publication are provided. Matching titles presented some

problems. German writings in various forms, books, essays, newspaper articles and conference lectures were published later in the United States in adapted or abridged forms with the selection of theme at the discretion of the publisher and the titles not necessarily related literally to original ones. For example, an autobiographical sketch was written in German by Tillich a few years after he arrived in the United States, intended primarily for readers there and so translated into English. It was not published in German then but became later the introduction to a collection of essays originally written in German. Major works written in English were translated into German after 1945, or after his death, and appear in an edition of collected works in Germany. Problems of relating translated works to originals have been solved, I think, by reference to two comprehensive collections assembled after Tillich's death.<sup>32</sup>

Five volumes of works of Tillich translated into French which are listed in the Bibliography have also been very helpful. The translation and editing has been done by a team of scholars centred at Laval University and publication has been sponsored by that University and two European publishers. These are translations both from German and from English. Particular attention has been paid to early writings in Germany which were not translated and published in the United States during Tillich's lifetime and afterwards.

There is a great deal of secondary literature about Tillich, much of it introductory, generally descriptive or focussed on one limited aspect or another of the subjects on which he wrote books, gave sermons, contributed essays, was interviewed and spoke at conferences. In the end he seems to have related ontology to almost everything, including physical health and the pleasures of dancing. Having appeared on the cover of Time Magazine and having been asked for a professional opinion on religion by the Supreme

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<sup>32</sup> (1) *Gesammelte Werke [Collected Works]*, Stuttgart, Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 14 Volumes, 1959 to 1975.

(2) *Main Works/Hauptwerke*, Berlin, New York, Evangelisches Verlagswerk GmbH, 1989

Court, he had, after all, become a genuine American celebrity. The selection listed in the bibliography refers only to what has contributed to my understanding in relation to the theme chosen.

Segundo's books have been published in Montevideo, Buenos Aires and Salamanca in Spain. They have been translated and published in English, French, Portuguese, Italian and probably in a few other languages. The principal publisher of his works in English, and of the works of Latin American liberation theologians generally has been Orbis Books in Maryknoll, New York. Some of the details of the publishing ventures in this case are worth noting because of the light they shed on the appeal of a church-centred movement to wider circles beyond their own region. A Nicaraguan priest, Miguel d'Escoto, went to the United States and became a member of Roman Catholic order of Maryknoll Missioners. He was the principal initiator of the publishing enterprise, Orbis Books, sponsored by the order. He then went back to Nicaragua, became a leading member of the liberation movement, joined the Sandinista Government after the revolution and became Foreign Minister. Along with the other priests who joined that Government he refused to resign at the Pope's request, having found his political career more relevant to his particular mission than his formal religious one. The liberation publications of Orbis Books have very likely had a significant influence in eliciting sympathy for the Latin American liberation movement in Church and in politically activist circles throughout North America, but I cannot cite any study to support this assumption.

The translated works of Segundo are identified also by reference to original titles in Spanish. There is not a great deal of secondary literature available in his case. From the material available about the liberation movement generally, and other theologians, I have made selective references to background material and political contexts for the chapters on Segundo.

### *Structure of the Study*

In the chapters dealing with Tillich and in those dealing with Segundo I have tried to bring into focus (1) the cultural, political and church environments influencing the theological response, (2) the nature of revision advocated which would shape the image and appeal of the Church and (3) the interactions with society, spiritual or political, collective or individual, which these theologians observe, analyze or propose. Although there are some cross-references between the two I have kept the respective chapters quite separate in order to emphasize the nature of a particular environment, inheritance and sense of personal purpose.

In the last chapter conclusions are drawn about models or implications for change to be taken from the writings of Tillich and Segundo with regard to the six critical areas listed earlier in this chapter. Those are followed by my own assessment of the significance of these conclusions in relation to the wider theme of contemporary dilemmas and radical defences.

## Chapter Two

### The Church at the End of an Age: the Perspectives of Paul Tillich

In order to trace a new model of the Church from the writings of Paul Tillich we have to consider his diagnosis of earlier models and their cultural environment. Since he engages in very wide-ranging philosophical analyses of Church, Culture and History, there are abundant indications of the diagnosis, even if reconciling the various elements within it relevant to the Church in particular is often difficult. The basic judgement is one which emerged in the immediate aftermath of the First World War when Tillich, after serving as a chaplain in the German Army, returned to an academic career in the economically disastrous and politically unstable first years of the Weimar Republic. He was certainly one of many writers of a philosophical, religious or literary bent of mind, in Europe and elsewhere, who were attempting to understand what had happened in 1914 to a civilization which had considered itself enlightened and progressive.

The following example of Tillich's perspectives is taken from a sermon before an American audience, published in 1948, but certainly reflecting what he thought about the end of an era in his early writings in the 1920's. Subsequent history including the Second World War could only have confirmed his judgements.

Our period has decided for a secular world. That was a great and much-needed decision. It threw a church from her throne, a church which had become a power of suppression and superstition. It gave consecration and holiness to our daily life and work. Yet it excluded those deep things for which religion stands; the feeling for the inexhaustible mystery of life, the grip of an ultimate meaning of existence, and the invincible power of an unconditional devotion. These things cannot be excluded. If we try to expel them in their divine images, they reemerge in daemonic images. Now in the old age of our secular world, we have seen the most horrible manifestations of these daemonic images; we have looked more deeply into the mystery of evil than most generations before us; we have seen the unconditional devotion of millions to a satanic image; we feel our period's sickness unto death.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Shaking of the Foundations*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948, p.180.

This dramatic overview provides a helpful introduction to the “church and culture” theme in Tillich’s writings. He attributes to culture, in this case identified as the secular world, the capability of endowing daily life and work with “consecration and holiness”; Luther, of course, claimed that this was exactly what the Church did. Tillich then refers to the “old age” of that secular world. This perception indicates how far Tillich had taken his distance from those in his own generation who, either in 1918, or in 1945, welcomed all evidence of a decision for a secular world, whether in Marxist, logical-positivist or secular existentialist forms. They predicted a continuing steady decline of religion as an important factor in society.

With regard to religion, Tillich, in spite of welcoming the overthrow of the Church from her throne and reporting “sickness unto death” within civilization, was in 1948 well-established and well-regarded in the Union Theological Seminary in New York, a major centre of liberal Protestantism and social activism. He was preparing a great theological synthesis which, while not restoring the Church to a throne all by itself, would define the mutual dependence, even essential unity, of the secular and religious, of Church and society.

In order to understand what Tillich hoped to restore, and improve, in that mutual dependence, we have to take account of why he thought that both religion and secularism had reached the end of an era. They had seemed to be launched in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries on some kind of accommodation appropriate to modernity, in spite of the French Revolution. They had, however, fallen apart with an intellectual, spiritual and social cleavage dangerous to Western society.

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### *The End of the Reformations*

Tillich's break, after 1918, with the formal orthodoxy of the sixteenth century Reformers, and then even with what came to be called liberal Protestantism of the nineteenth century, was a decisive one. The reasons given for that break meant that he could even less accept the orthodoxy of Roman Catholicism as it had been affirmed at the Council of Trent and confirmed at the Vatican One Council in the nineteenth century. Mircea Eliade, who conducted a seminar jointly with Tillich at the University of Chicago, judged that Tillich had, during the First World War, "immersed himself in Nietzsche's philosophy and discovered, as Nietzsche had already prophetically proclaimed, that the God of the German and European bourgeoisie was dead".<sup>2</sup>

Tillich testified that "a sense of alienation accompanied my increasing criticism of the doctrines and institutions of the Church".<sup>3</sup> The break with regard to the formulation of doctrine was fundamental. He could not accept "supranatural theology which was the way classical Protestant orthodoxy formulated the idea of God in systematic theology". The process of doctrinal formulation was carried out "without looking beyond the revelatory circles which one calls one's own religion or faith. This is the predominant method in all Christian churches".<sup>4</sup> In ecclesiology, unsolved problems from the Reformation period could not be left without new attempts to define the Church.

The problem of the Church was the most unsolved problem which the Reformation left to future generations [...] the Catholic system was not replaced and could not be replaced definitively by a Protestant system of equal power because of the anti-authoritarian and anti-hierarchical form of Protestant thinking.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Future of Religions*, New York: Harper and Row, 1966, p.34.

<sup>3</sup> *On the Boundary: an Autobiographical Sketch*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966, p.59.

<sup>4</sup> *The Future of Religions*, p.92.

<sup>5</sup> *A History of Christian Thought: from its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967, 1968, p.252.

The weakest element in Lutheran theology was its attempt to define the nature of the Church.

Luther's distinction between the visible and the invisible Church is one of the most difficult things to understand [...] they are the same Church, not two Churches. The invisible Church is the spiritual quality of the visible Church. And the visible Church is the empirical and always distorted actualization of the spiritual Church. This was perhaps the most important point of the Reformers against the sects.<sup>6</sup>

In rejecting some major elements in Protestant orthodoxy, Tillich pointed also to an "empty space" left when many Catholic symbols were given up, particularly those with a "female element". Traces remained in some Protestant doctrinal emphases but it is, argued Tillich, a "masculine religion".<sup>7</sup>

These are the comments of Tillich looking back to Protestant orthodoxy of the Reformation founders and drawing a clear line between that system of thought and his own developing ideas about a new system. Since reference is made at the beginning of this chapter to the "end of an age", a distinction must be kept in mind between Tillich's own historical and philosophical perspectives with regard to Christianity and the Church and those of others about an end and its implications. That the end of the First World War produced a very widespread despair and cynicism about almost all tradition and orthodoxy, at least in intellectual circles, is clear. In those same circles, as already noted, secularist convictions, free of all religious ones, were strengthened.

Among Christian theologians there were both shared assessments of the failures of the churches in the preceding two centuries and divergent judgements about the implications for the future. Karl Barth obviously was not prepared to draw a line between fundamental elements in Reformation orthodoxy and his own position, as Tillich did. Instead, he emphasized the power and relevance of Biblical judgements on the world

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ultimate Concern: Tillich in Dialogue*, New York, Evanston, Ill., London: Harper and Row, 1965, p. 148

which had inspired Reformation theology. Tillich found Barthian theology to be a continuation of outworn creedalism and doctrinal rigidity, indifferent to social questions and therefore representative of the very religious, social and political traditions in Germany which had to be brought to an end.<sup>8</sup>

Tillich fully supported the political objectives of Barth and the Confessional Church in 1934 in opposing Nazi efforts to incorporate them in a German Christianity. He had some harsh criticism, however, of the conservative image which that Church presented and the lack of influence it had in rallying support against the Nazis among either the intelligentsia or the workers.

The proletariat sank back into religious passivity. Though the intelligentsia came to admire the Church for its stand against nationalistic paganism, they were not drawn to it. The dogma defended by the Church did not and could not appeal to them. In order to reach this group, the Church must proclaim the Gospel that is comprehensible to a non-ecclesiastical humanism [...].<sup>9</sup>

Rational criticism is powerless before the meaning of the archetypal word, "God", but atheism is a correct response to the "objectively" existing God of literalistic thought.<sup>10</sup>

Tillich's judgement that dogma reiterated or defined in the sixteenth century would have to yield to a new theological system was made at an early stage in his writings, was expressed frequently in the following years, and was applied to Roman Catholicism as well as to Protestantism. He died in the year in which the Vatican Council II was concluded. He had expressed sympathy with the initiatives leading to that Council but could not assess the results in terms of the change he had advocated. By that time, he had obtained an attentive audience among Christian theologians. A distinctive feature of his appeal was that he did not, following Enlightenment critics and earlier Protestant

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<sup>8</sup> *On the Boundary: an Autobiographical Sketch*, op.cit.,p.76 and Wilhelm Pauck, *Paul Tillich, His Life and Thought*, Vol. I, New York et al.: Harper and Row, p. 194, 195.

<sup>9</sup> *On the Boundary*, p. 64.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 65.

liberals, simply reject the past in favour of a linear progress, intellectual, religious and social, into the future. He thought that in the medieval period a relative harmony of the religious and the secular, of Christianity and humanism, had been achieved. He was not suggesting that it would be possible to recreate the elements in either side of that balance, only that history in this case helped him to make his point about the serious, even tragic, lack of harmony between religion and culture in his world. While he did not reject the past and what he found there to incorporate into his system, he could not return to it.

Tillich lamented the loss by Protestants of the particularly powerful symbolism of the Virgin Mary and her status in Catholic thought and emotion, but “the story of the virgin birth” was “from the point of view of historical research an obviously legendary story”.<sup>11</sup> Legendary stories, even sacred ones, may, or may not, give birth to powerful symbols but they cannot compete with miraculous revelation in the minds of those convinced of that revelation. Although Tillich marshalled all the arguments he found convincing--ontological, experiential, existentialist, logical--in support of his theology of “God beyond God”, the Ground of Being, he rejected the traditional proofs for the existence of God which had formed part of the orthodox system in that period of relative harmony.<sup>12</sup> In terms of basic beliefs, that cultural environment was a profoundly Christian one. This was not the situation faced by Tillich in attempting to design a new framework for religion and culture.

#### *The Nineteenth Century Balance*

One of the complaints directed by Tillich at a dogmatic, orthodox Church, as we have noted, was that it failed to present itself properly to non-ecclesiastical humanism

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<sup>11</sup> E. Forrester Church ed., *The Essential Tillich; an Anthology of the Writings of Paul Tillich*, New York: the Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987, p. 55.

<sup>12</sup> *Dogmatique: Cours donné à Marbourg en 1925*, Paris, Genève, Québec: Cerf, Fides, Univ. Laval, 1997, p. lxvii.

and was not receptive to positive elements in modern thought. There was, however, a very important effort made within Protestantism in the nineteenth century to come to terms with modernity and to define the essential Christian truths and the role of the Church in relation to contemporary culture. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Tillich, who had been educated by teachers committed to that trend in Protestant thought, and who respected the attempts made earlier to achieve a synthesis of compatible elements in religion and culture, nevertheless found that synthesis defective in a number of respects. Following are a few examples of his critique of a synthesis identified as “liberal”. He is referring to a debate within Protestantism, and particularly European Protestantism. The Roman Catholic Church, after Enlightenment attacks, and the very menacing impact of the French Revolution, followed a different course with respect to liberalism and modernism.

Tillich was strongly committed in his earlier German period to religious socialism as a movement which would apply traditional religious wisdom to the solution of an acute social crisis created by the confrontation of secular ideologies. From this perspective, a major part of his critique of the liberal synthesis was that Protestantism “does not possess an independent culture apart from capitalist society”.<sup>13</sup> “Protestantism stands at the very centre of the problem of church and capitalist society”.<sup>14</sup> Tillich attributed this weakness to an important extent to the fact that Protestantism “has no autonomous system of social and political ethics which can serve as a criterion for every social order, as Catholicism has in Thomism”.<sup>15</sup> More than that, liberal theologians of that period, such as Harnack and Ritschl, did not really have a systematic theology. They were impressed with the results of modern historical research, but in applying those results to a revision of Christian thought and to a concept of the role of the Church in

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<sup>13</sup> *The Religious Situation*, New York: World Publishing Company, 1956, p. 183

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 199

<sup>15</sup> *The Protestant Era*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963, p. xxi.

society, understood them in the wrong way.<sup>16</sup>

Since Tillich was constantly moving back and forth between what appeared to be a boundary between religion and culture in a particular period, and also altering his critique of his predecessors as theologians from different perspectives, it is not easy to define simply how he judged that liberal synthesis of the preceding century. From a historical perspective, he seems to have considered passage through that period of theology more or less inevitable. He paid full tribute to Friedrich Schleiermacher at the beginning of that century in his revised interpretation of the essence of Christianity and his presentation of a new image of the Church to Enlightenment critics. He did not accuse the theologians directly of propagating a capitalist ethos, or of lacking any social ethics. He did accuse them of abandoning too much of their theological inheritance and of yielding too rapidly to an optimistic, progressive, bourgeois spirit of the age. "We believed once that we were living in a period of unavoidable progress to a better humanity. But in the depth of our social structure the forces of destruction had already gathered strength".<sup>17</sup> Albert Ritschl, following the anti-metaphysical bias of that generation of theologians had reduced Christianity to ethical theism, without divine mystery and majesty and, of particular concern to Tillich, without a sense of the demonic.

After the First World War, Tillich, Barth and others turned against their predecessors. Their motives were varied: theological, existentialist and political. The synthesis, or attempt at synthesis, between religion and its cultural environment which had been dominant was unreal. Kierkegaard became a hero for talking of the reality of existence. Ironically, considering what Tillich said about the old age of secularism, and its demonries, he turned to leading thinkers, Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, in environments

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<sup>16</sup> *A History of Christian Thought*, p. 517, 519.

<sup>17</sup> *The Shaking of the Foundations*, p. 58.

hostile to Christianity, not as a convert to a whole body of thought in any of these cases, but as a means of deepening his own sense of the reality of the human situation.

Tillich had good reason to be pessimistic about that reality by the time he had to leave Germany when the Nazi regime began. Hope for a new beginning in democratic socialism with a religious foundation had ended. “Liberal Protestantism has been pressed to the edge of complete insignificance. Catholicism has pulled back into strict churchly heteronomy the free groups that it tolerated for a while”.<sup>18</sup>

*The Empirical Church: Dismal Reality or Regenerated Community*

So far in this chapter, the focus in Tillich’s diagnosis of the religious situation has been primarily theological, centred in German and European affairs following the First World War and the advent to power of the Nazis in 1933. It has taken into account a general “end of the age” mood after 1918. In order to pursue the diagnosis of reality required before the definition of a possible new model, the framework has to be extended in time and in environment. The theological analysis provided by Tillich does not necessarily indicate the empirical reality of the Church as institution, its image and cultural involvement. The gloomy analysis of theological error on the part both of those defined at the earlier period as “conservative” or “liberal” did, of course, continue intermittently throughout Tillich’s life, so far as the empirical Church was concerned. It was, however, interspersed with more hopeful indications of regeneration.

In Volume III of his *Systematic Theology*, Tillich offers his own conclusions. In spite of the “rather miserable reality of concrete churches”, they were capable of possessing “the unambiguous life of the Spiritual Community”. There is “regenerative power in the churches, even in their most miserable state”.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *The Socialist Decision*, p.36.

<sup>19</sup> p. 165, 166, 168

Those were comments published in 1963. He spoke also to a University audience on the “avowed irrelevance” of Christian preaching and on the Church in society generally. Although the text of his remarks were not published until 1996, it is clear from the text that the lecture took place early in the 1960’s. Excerpts from this text indicate how he assessed churches towards the end of his life.

What the church needs in any period (and got through much of its history) is leadership by the strongest, most dynamic and most daring kinds of people –those in whom there is high vitality balanced with profound spirituality. That is the ideal leader in the church, lay or clergy. Today such leadership is rare, since the strongest go into the creative functions of culture where they see the greatest opportunities.<sup>20</sup>

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Few things have contributed as much to the irrelevance of Christianity as has the Sunday school. Something which aids and abets traditionalism in the expectation by many lay persons that the churches should be a mainstay of conformism and conservatism in general.<sup>21</sup>

.....

Only through his death can he be the Messiah. This is the basic paradox of Christianity over against the unparadoxical, religiously primitive attitude of the disciples. Most churches are followers of the disciples in the fight of Jesus against them. This appears again and again in the history of the church in the glorification of the forms which embody the ultimate meaning of the event. The embodiment itself was glorified rather than what was embodied. And this is still the case.<sup>22</sup>

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Against this error Tillich evoked the “Protestant principle” (his frequently reiterated argument against a divine presence inherent in Church or Scripture); there

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<sup>20</sup> *The Irrelevance and the Relevance of the Christian Message*, Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1996, Dunwood Foster ed., p.19

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 18

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, p. 49

must always be two things in church life: “the duality of tradition and reformation”, the church “in its essence” protests against the church “in its existence”.<sup>23</sup>

In this very negative weighing of the relevance, or irrelevance, of the Christian message are there any very convincing indications of a personal faith on Tillich’s part, underlying a fairly calm philosophical, and very theoretical assurance that the message, and the institution, were capable of regeneration? In this particular text we do not find very much along this line. He does say that when the distortion of the essence of the Church “ hits me so deeply” that “I incline to turn away from the churches”, “something breaks through all the weakness, banality, and corruption of actual church life. This has happened probably to all of us again and again”. Since these comments were prefaced by uncharacteristically sentimental language about “a little service in a small church, an act of love inspired by biblical symbols, the image of Jesus”, the credibility of the assurance is somewhat weakened.<sup>24</sup>

Nevertheless, we have to give Tillich the benefit of doubt about the full implications for the churches of an academic theological system. He certainly seems to have been more effective in lecture/sermons on broad ontological themes about “the courage to be” than in any occasional references to the experience of little services in small churches. He did provide other theologians, and seminary professors and students, with a theological system closer to contemporary concepts of truth in religion than the orthodox supernatural one which he attacked.

Finally, in the way of very general judgements about the effectiveness of the churches as bearers of the essential Christian message, it is worth noting Tillich’s comments on a theme, “Existentialist Aspects of Modern Art” with which, as in the case of the philosophy of history, or psychology, he felt at ease. These were comments made

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p. 49

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p. 48

to an American audience about the attraction which German expressionism had always had for him because of what he considered to be its religious impact.

The churches followed in most cases the petty bourgeoisie resistance against modern art and against existentialism generally. The churches believed they had all the answers. But in believing that they had all the answers they deprived the answers of their meaning. These answers were no longer understood because the questions were no longer understood, and this was the churches' fault. They did not do what the existentialist artists did. They did not ask the questions over again as they should have out of the experience of despair in industrial society. The churches did not ask the question, and therefore their answers, all the religious answers Christianity has in its creed, became empty.<sup>25</sup>

Tillich also paid tribute to contemporary writers, Eliot, Sartre and Auden, who had revealed the truth about "Wasteland", "No Exit" and "Age of Anxiety".<sup>26</sup> Two of these writers shared Tillich's conviction that there was a message relevant to these situations in Christianity, and that the empirical churches were not incapable of regeneration.

#### *Denominations, Countries, Cultures*

The diagnosis of the *malaise* of the churches so far has been presented in very general terms. It must be completed with some excerpts relevant to particular denominations, countries and cultures. These comments, as well as the ones cited above, must be put into the context of Tillich's own personal distance from the very institutions whose weaknesses in presenting the essential Christian message he lamented. He did say that although he had "often criticized Church doctrine and practice, the Church has always been my home. This became very clear to me at the time when neo-pagan ideas were making their way into it and when I feared that I would lose my religious as well as my political home".<sup>27</sup> Apart from his service as a military chaplain and some

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<sup>25</sup> *What is Religion?* New York, Evanston, Ill., London: Harper and Row, 1969 p. 101

<sup>26</sup> *Theology of Culture*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1964, p. 207

<sup>27</sup> *On the Boundary*; p. 58

administrative tasks for the Lutheran Church after 1918, his career became an academic one. His theological writings, with their cultural context, gained increasing attention in church circles but he did not enter into any active involvement with church affairs. He was invited to one ecumenical conference in Britain in 1937 (part of the movement which led to the founding of the World Council of Churches in 1948) and attended it. He was not invited again, was disappointed and thought that his theological radicalism explained this fact. Others thought that his lack of direct commitments within a church offered a more likely explanation. In Germany, he did take a leadership role within an intellectual group promoting their concept of religious socialism but did not become actively engaged with the German Socialist Party.

In the United States, he was welcomed into theological circles, spoke in pulpits and became known in much wider circles as an eminent theologian (as was his due) but not as a religious leader. He did not engage in any historical, sustained analysis of how particular churches were dealing with the intellectual and cultural perils created by the impact of modernity. He did not suggest how they might, specifically, remedy the weakness and distortions which Tillich analyzed globally (assuming, of course, that they agreed more or less with him). Tillich was not alone with his warnings. Those actively engaged within the churches, and as sensitive to the issues of religion and culture as he was, have been much more directly involved. They have dealt directly with the dilemmas of how to bring about change in a message and in an institution considered timeless, without collapsing the walls of the Church.

None of this is a criticism of the impressive contribution which Tillich did make to new thinking about the philosophical rationale, the apologetics, the theological revisionism and the relations with the cultural environment required to ensure that the essential truths of revelation and of traditional experience and wisdom were not lost. In view of the fact, however, that we are engaged in a search for a possible new model, it is important to note that we have to put one together from the partial indications offered.

We do not find one readily available in terms of an existing branch of the Church or of a realistic set of proposals to accomplish change.

With those limitations in mind, let us add to the diagnosis of weaknesses (even some strengths) by taking account of how Tillich saw particular denominations or countries. What he thought of the situation in the Lutheran Church in Germany with which he began his critique has already mostly been noted. A theology which divided politics and religion into quite separate spheres, combined, paradoxically with an underlying nationalism, and with a strong conservative attachment to foundational dogma of the Reformation, made it particularly vulnerable to Nazi pressure for a “German Christianity”. Theologians who did introduce new perspectives in a historical approach to interpreting Christianity were misled by Enlightenment assumptions about a rational harmony and progress.

Tillich did enter into a new world with respect to Church and society when he went to the United States and emerged, as he admitted, from a European provincialism. In New York, and particularly at the Union Theological Seminary, he found a particularly American mix of the social gospel, idealism, pragmatism, social realism, moralism and abundant Biblical exegesis applied to political affairs. The American “New Deal” response to the economic depression was not much like Tillich’s religious socialism but Tillich had to admit that it did have attractive features by his own social, ethical criteria.

In American Christianity the Church is a social agent, among others, which tries to surpass the others in attractiveness. Its foundations are more or less taken for granted, but the practical demands following from its nature, are in the center of interest. Making man better, helping him to become a person, and making the social conditions better, helping them to become actualizations of the Kingdom of God on earth—this is the function of the Church. Theology, in this view, has no so much the function of struggling for an adequate formulation of ultimate truth as of preparing theological students for their task as leaders of a congregation.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Theology of Culture*, p. 168.

In spite of the theologian's reservation about the importance of "ultimate truth", these comments indicate a recognition by Tillich that he had moved into a different culture and that the balance between religion and culture which had so concerned him in Germany might have to seem from a new vantage point. This recognition is underlined by further comments.

This leads to another surprising discovery we made in American Protestantism: its world-wide horizons. The fact of the many denominational churches shows to everybody in an existential way that there are other possibilities of Protestant expression than one's own. It points back to different lines of church-historical development since the Reformation and before it.<sup>29</sup>

Tillich was, of course, very much given to generalization, and systematization. He reached the following conclusion about Europe and America.

The European danger is a lack of horizontal actualization [a remarkably pedantic way of referring to optimistic and pragmatic social activism among Americans]; the American danger is a lack of vertical depth [...] In Europe the problem of the Church is the problem of its ultimate foundation, and theology is supposed to explain this foundation in a completely balanced theological system.<sup>30</sup>

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Courage is another important element in American philosophical thought. Perhaps one could say that the emphasis on becoming, process, growth, progress etc., in American philosophy is the expression of a courage which takes upon itself risks, failures, regressions, disappointment in a way which one can hardly find in the groups which are mostly responsible for Continental philosophy. They rarely resist the temptation to escape into the vertical when the horizontal line leads to a breakdown.<sup>31</sup>

Tillich found the pragmatic optimism of the Americans to be a moving and transforming experience and the results are obvious in the new period of his writings. He also noted the influence in the United States of German nineteenth century liberal Protestantism

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p. 169

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 168

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, p. 172

which, as we have noted, he had attacked for its unfounded bourgeois optimism; “German Ritschlianism was still a strong force in American theology, when in Germany it had lost most of its influence”.<sup>32</sup> This encounter with a familiar theology in a quite different cultural setting presumably influenced Tillich in his continuing analysis of the interactions between religion and culture. Both the newly created Germany of the nineteenth century and the United States were conscious of increasing power and material success. In Germany the disasters which began in 1914 help to explain the theological reactions of Barth and Tillich to their nineteenth century predecessors. The Americans had not lost the essential confidence typical of the previous century. Moreover, Tillich encountered in the United States examples of what he pointed out later, that Calvinists and Catholics (unlike German Lutherans) did not hesitate to try to reform society, even with the political risks which this entailed.

Tillich did not cease to express misgivings about a lack of “vertical depth” among American theologians. He was impressed with the institutional strength of the churches but also with the impact of secularization. American theologians had tried to make their doctrines more respectable in wider circles by applying experiential, empirical research methods to processes of revision. Tillich thought that the result of this approach “was actually the expression of conformity to non-Christian ideas”.<sup>33</sup> He did not define these ideas in that place; presumably he was referring to what he called autonomous, and largely secular, culture and how it could generate distortions of reason and spiritual meaning in capitalism, scientism and manipulative technical reasoning.

On the one hand, Tillich warned what might loosely be called the liberal movements in the United States and in Protestantism generally about the dangers of losing a theological, sacramental basis and becoming associations of clubs for moral

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<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, p. 173

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p. 168

purposes. He warned about shallow idealism emerging from an unquestioned social gospel and about an equally unquestioned pragmatism in philosophy.<sup>34</sup> He also found a fundamentalism of very much the same nature in both the United States and elsewhere; “post-Reformation fundamentalist thought about the Word of God, according to theologians in Germany and Holland in 1620”.<sup>35</sup> In Europe at an earlier period he reported that unchanging Christian conservatism had led to “the abandonment of the Protestant church by the larger part of the educated world”.<sup>36</sup> In the United States he found a substantially different situation in this sense but noted the appeal of an increasingly secularized culture to the same educated world. It is not surprising that Tillich, faced with varieties of Christianity and of national cultures, and with changing relations between them, hesitated to define a universal ecumenical model, except in very general terms. He did outline the dimensions of situations critical for the survival of Christianity, as he saw them.

What of other churches not directly referred to so far in this survey of denominations, countries and cultures? First of all, how did he rate the Eastern Orthodox Churches which could certainly claim a strong “vertical” identity, a firm sacramental basis and an undoubted influence on national cultures?

In a discussion with American students, Tillich defended a controversial statement he had made earlier about the Greek Orthodox Church, that he liked it “very much”, but that it was in many respects “obsolete”. He was pressed by the students to define this term, since Orthodox churches had spread to the United States as well and students had difficulty in understanding what made them obsolete.

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<sup>34</sup> This critique is developed in the following places, among others: *The Future of Religions*, p. 87; *The Shaking of the Foundations*, p. 66; *A History of Christian Thought*, p. 302 to 304, p. 506, 507.

<sup>35</sup> *Ultimate Concern*, p. 192.

<sup>36</sup> *The Religious Situation*, p. 202

How can any church union with it be possible? We cannot go back and pretend that the whole history of Western Christendom [...] has never happened. The whole liturgy, the whole dogmatic fixation of the first five hundred years of church history, is something that no longer works.<sup>37</sup>

The churches of the Anglican communion were not given a much higher rating with respect to change and capability in dealing with modernity. In one of his lectures on the history of doctrine, Tillich summed up Anglicanism as being liturgy, political structures and ethics, with “no great depth” theologically. In this case, he was thinking about the Church of England.<sup>38</sup> On another occasion he was writing about the Episcopal Church in the United States, although the comments referred to Anglicanism in general.

At the same time, Protestant provincialism is avoided by the fact that, for example, the Episcopal Church, in spite of its basically Protestant theology, preserved many Catholic elements in its way of life. One of the main problems of my theology--namely Protestant principle and Catholic substance--arose out of this experience.<sup>39</sup>

Tillich noted that Bishop John Robinson in his book, *Honest to God*, had administered a certain shock to the traditionalism of a Church which had never taken seriously the problem of the union of tradition and modern thought.<sup>40</sup>

In one of his essays on the theme of religion and culture, however, Tillich approached the religious situation in England from a different perspective. He raised the question of the relevance of a prevailing theological system, and its “depth”, in a particular period and place, in relation to the fundamental strength of a church and its service to its members. He noted that “the one country [England] without an Existential philosophy is that in which during the period 1830 to 1930 the religious tradition

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<sup>37</sup> *Ultimate Concern*, p. 148.

<sup>38</sup> *A History of Christian Thought*, p. 302 to 304.

<sup>39</sup> *Theology of Culture*, p. 169.

<sup>40</sup> *A History of Christian Thought*, p. 359, 360. *Honest to God*, London: S.C.M. Press, 1963.

remained strongest". On the European continent the Existentialist philosophy was dependent upon [I think Tillich meant, emerged from] the breakdown of the religious tradition. In England "positivism and the religious tradition lived on side by side, united by a social conformism which prevented radical questions about the meaning of human "Existence".<sup>41</sup>

This very interesting observation requires some response at this point because it raises points about the dilemmas of change which will have to be dealt with in a later chapter. In the first place, it emphasizes again the need to understand theology in relation to a culture, or, to put it another way, the need to understand the interaction between theology and culture in particular times and places. Would it be heretical to suggest that this has been true from the middle of the first century on, so far as Christians are concerned? Suggesting this is in accordance with Tillich's philosophy of religion, even although it seems to have taken his emigration to the United States to make these considerations vivid with respect to German nineteenth century liberalism in an American setting.

In the second place, Tillich is entitled to define "existential philosophy" and "positivism" as he wishes, from a European continental perspective, but he cannot argue that "social conformism [...] prevented radical questions about the meaning of human Existence" in England. Literature was full of direct or implied questions directed to traditional Christianity. The critical philosophies which began to be expressed from the eighteenth century on, cautiously but steadily, took their distance from the theologies of state and other churches for the very reason that their questions about the human situation (not, perhaps, quite the same as Tillich's "existence") did not find adequate answers in those theologies. The English political culture after the Civil War permitted considerable religious and philosophical diversity, provided that the social fabric was not seriously

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<sup>41</sup> *Theology of Culture*, p. 108

disturbed. As for the established church and its alleged lack of theological depth, if Church leaders for the period in question (1830-1930) could be brought back they would probably say, in answer to Tillich, that traditional creeds, a continuing sacramental presence and their own theologies kept the Church strong (which Tillich conceded) without benefit of German philosophizing and theologizing.

In the third place, Tillich's negative assessments of so many aspects of contemporary Christianity seems to be based essentially on considerations about weakness in the face of the formidable and dangerous power of secular modernity (his "autonomous culture".) He stops short of suggesting that authentic Christianity (in his own terms of fragmentary being and existential "salvation") was not being transmitted by the churches. He could scarcely do so without wrecking his own proposed theological system and his assertions about "regeneration". He is dependent upon the continuity of the "Spiritual Community" (of which, the cultural "form" is, of course, the Church). He did not invent it. If it continues, in spite of outworn dogmatic interpretations of the "Christ-event", then presumably a process of considerable theological readjustment required to absorb Tillich's system could go on without seriously disturbing that continuity. These questions belong, however, to a later chapter about a possible new model and how it might be achieved.

To return to the examination of denominations, countries and cultures as Tillich saw them in his lifetime, we conclude by considering how he assessed the Roman Catholic Church, his most formidable opponent. It can be regarded in this way for two reasons. He believed, as already noted, that the power of secularism had dislodged the Church (all the churches) from a throne in which power had led to suppression and superstition. He felt alienated from the supranatural theology reaffirmed in the sixteenth century and later. After the First World War, the Roman Catholic Church had relapsed, he said, into "strictly churchly heteronomy" (page 33 above). Nevertheless, Tillich had

Tillich had considerable respect for the institutional power of that Church, presumably because he realized increasingly that a good deal of institutional power would be required to effect the theological and other changes necessary to ensure the survival of Christianity in modern culture without disastrous fragmentation.

In addition, Tillich found in Roman Catholicism a highly articulated theological and ecclesiastical system with basic elements which he would like to have in the system which he was evolving in theory. Roman Catholicism, it seems, began to appear less as opponent than rival in dealing with secularism. For example, he lamented the fact that Protestantism had no autonomous system of social and political ethics, comparable to Thomism (see page 31, above). He did not, of course, say that he had become a neo-Thomist. He also criticized the Protestant liberals of the nineteenth century for their lack of a systematic theology which would have assured a dimension of divinity, mystery and majesty comparable to that found in traditional theologies. The Protestant Reformers had never really evolved a new and effective concept of the Church. They had ended the power of some symbols (for good reasons, Tillich pointed out) without going on to generate others. As for the social and political role of the Church, Tillich's Germanic feelings about system and order led him to point to "the lack of an independent hierarchy in Protestantism" which made it "almost impossible for it to be independent of the state" or of "the interests of a special social group".<sup>42</sup> This is indeed a firm indication of Tillich's concern about having institutional power, even at the risk of distortions and abuse in its use to support what he saw as outworn dogma.

Other comments about the Roman Catholic Church help to develop the profile as Tillich saw it. One recurring element in what he referred to as "Catholic substance" in a model for a regenerated Church was the mystical one. This was not confined to Roman

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<sup>42</sup> *The Protestant Era*, p. 228

Catholicism but certainly part of that profile. It might be “the way in which a different sort of Protestantism, a nonmoralistic and non-intellectualistic Protestantism, may return to some of the positive elements in Catholicism”.<sup>43</sup> To this may be added a general definition about an attitude towards Rome, even if it is ambiguous. Even if opposed to the “most expressly heteronomous religious system, Roman Catholicism”, Tillich said, his opposition was never directed “against dogmatic values or liturgical forms”.<sup>44</sup> If the implication of this comment is that the dogmatic values and liturgical forms could be transplanted in a new theonomous model, then Tillich is ignoring the base for values and forms in a claim to infallibility based on revelation in Scripture.

Other tributes to an opponent and rival were more straightforward. The Catholic Church “is by nature inclined to reject the capitalist spirit”, even if the motive might have more to do with a return to earlier economic models than an advance to contemporary limitations on capitalist power.<sup>45</sup> Tillich claimed to know directly that Pope John XXIII, who had just summoned Vatican Council II, did not like the doctrine of infallibility and was hoping to limit its effects in some way.<sup>46</sup> He assumed, therefore, that this Pope had realized that narrowness in dogma could not be maintained, or “the Catholic Church would become completely irrelevant”. There would be opposition to reform. “The Spanish and South American bishops are, of course, the most tradition-bound, hierarchical and immovable”.<sup>47</sup> Tillich did not live to observe the number of bishops at the Medellin Conference in 1968 who subscribed, in general terms, to liberation theology. His basic instinct was right, however, that Roman Catholicism might be heteronomous but not necessarily immovable.

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<sup>43</sup> *Ultimate Concern*, p. 149.

<sup>44</sup> *On the Boundary*, p. 39.

<sup>45</sup> *The Religious Situation*, p. 182.

<sup>46</sup> *Ultimate Concern*, p. 148.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, p. 93, 94.

*New Model  
for  
Post-Christianity*

What might we extract from this brief survey of Tillich's diagnosis of the weaknesses and errors of Christianity, at least in the way of outlining a consistently negative model which might suggest the nature of an alternative to be sought? The only clear part of the diagnosis is a theological one. Supranatural theology, as Tillich defined it, that is the objectively existing God of literalistic thought, the elevation of narratives with no more than a legendary basis into dogma, the glorification of the form in which spiritual meaning was embodied rather than of the meaning, must be abandoned. Unless the reader, or listener, accepts the philosophical, cultural and theological case made by Tillich in support of this proposal, there would be little point in looking for a new model of the Church. The defenders of the orthodoxy he attacked might accept parts of Tillich's diagnosis with respect to the dangers of secularism, and of the weaknesses of churches in the face of those dangers. Their response would be the strengthening of that orthodoxy as the only way of protecting the faith.

If Tillich's basic first step is accepted, then there might be agreement about the nature of the many difficulties to be overcome but few answers as to how this is to be done, as the comments cited indicate. No particular church is proposed as an example, in general, even if Tillich pointed to positive developments on one point or another. Existing concepts of the Church fell short of meeting the challenge of secular modernity, even of communicating effectively with non-ecclesiastical humanists who were potentially sympathetic, but outside the Church. The force of particular symbolism had eroded and was not being replaced. Nineteenth century liberalism was, at best, a transitional attempt to reconcile traditional and modern thought. Protestantism, from Tillich's perspective had no systematic, ethical response to the social evils produced by

industrialization and capitalism. This judgement can indeed be contested by Protestants who have been committed to the social gospel for a century, often pragmatically, but not without theological support. As for the Roman Catholic Church, social teaching for a century, along with the development of liberation theology within the Church, must be considered in relation to Tillich's demands for a social role. Tillich had faith in comprehensive systems by which to plan objectives but this inclination did not necessarily enable him to measure incremental and pragmatic change.

Some of Tillich's negative assessments, such as lack of leadership or lay expectations of conservative conformism can only be noted as such; those accepting his basic theological judgement and implementing it can only hope that in due course such conditions will change. Some of Tillich's hopes and preferences are quite clear but a theological change of course will not necessarily indicate how to strike a balance between avoiding authoritarianism and maintaining institutional power. Nor will it do so between social activism following prophetic demands and avoiding becoming a secular association or a political movement. There is the basic risk involved in being open to the cultural environment but not being conformed to it or manipulated by it. Churches make these difficult choices now, wherever they are on a theological spectrum.

Looming over all ideas about the degree of theological change advocated by Tillich is the question of adapting language. Those historical creeds, symbols, catechisms and confessional declarations which cannot be properly subjected to Tillich's hermeneutics must be changed to ensure harmony with new convictions about the truth they are supposed to embody. He conceded that he had no immediate answer about adaptation of language, let alone revised creedal content.

But attempts made thus far to translate the archaic language of liturgy and Scripture into contemporary idiom have been deplorable failures.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *On the Boundary*, p. 65.

Tillich's persistence with a grand synthesis of ideas as a basis for change, in spite of all these difficulties, must be understood in the light of his assessment not only of the churches but of secular modernity. He subjected what he defined as orthodox Christianity to severe criticism. That does not necessarily mean disenchantment. His disenchantment referred to fundamental aspects of that modernity, even if he conceded, as we have noted, that the secular world had brought about essential change.

*"Demonries of the Present"*

In the "old age of our secular world", that is after Enlightenment hopes for rational harmony and material progress suffered the shock of the First World War, Tillich attempted to strike a balance between the secularity of that world and his own profound conviction that it was only from a religious perspective that the meaning of all aspects of life could be understood. That religious perspective, and the Christian presence in Western culture, were diminishing, even to the point of disappearing, he thought. There is no certainty that "a finite reality [...] even Christian culture is indestructible".<sup>49</sup> "Two great traditions, the Christian and the humanistic" had "lost their comprehensive character and their convincing power".<sup>50</sup> Tillich faced the question as to why, when the development of Western society took place on the basis of a Christian culture, a secular, and increasingly autonomous culture had turned against the Church as the representative of that Christian culture. His reply was two-fold. The ecclesiastical and dogmatic forms, and images, of the Church were losing meaning. Contact with and influence upon the surrounding culture were diminishing.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, powerful forces in that environment were developing what Tillich identified in 1926 as the

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<sup>49</sup> *Interpretation of History*, New York, London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936, p.122

<sup>50</sup> *Theology of Culture*, p.108.

<sup>51</sup> *Aux frontières de la religion et de la science*, Paris: Le Centurion, 1970, p. 88, (from an essay of 1928)

“demonries of the present”.<sup>52</sup> They were as extensive as the weaknesses identified on the religious side.

Not surprisingly, considering Tillich’s early commitment to religious socialism and opposition to Nazism, capitalism and nationalism came first as examples of the demonic in world affairs, with a particular relevance to Germany in 1918 and in the following decades. He was always fascinated by the relationship between the creative and the demonic, in the religious as in other spheres. “The capitalist form of economics”, he argued, “has to the highest degree the supporting, creative and transforming character of the truly demonic, but it is just as true that this creative force is combined with a destructive one of horrible strength”.<sup>53</sup>

It is also impossible to drive the demonic factor of economics down to the plane of general sinfulness, with religious-moral categories such as Mammonism, in order to separate the technical quality of capitalism from it. The depth of the demonic is just this, that the meaningful and meaningless elements in it are inseparably combined.<sup>54</sup>

.....  
But real demonry--if this word is to have any special content--occurs only in connection with a positive, sustaining, creative-destructive power.<sup>55</sup>

That creative-destructive power was also true of the “great demonry of the present, nationalism”. Apart from theology and philosophical apologetics about religion, Tillich developed a philosophy of history, with a largely religious intention, of course. His theories about myths of origin and identity, those of race and soil, opposed to prophetic demands for justice based on reason and special revelation, go well beyond the scope of this study.

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<sup>52</sup> *Interpretation of History*, p. 115 to 122 .

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, p. 120

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*

Revolutions, counter-revolutions, quasi-religious ideologies and secularist indifference to institutional religion were elements in that secular world which were bound to shake the confidence of the Church that it represented immutable truth and provided the normative guide for culture. Its opponents were, on one side, a capitalist economic system created by bourgeois rationalism and technical efficiency, and, on the other, nationalism which claimed “sacral untouchability and ritual dignity”.<sup>56</sup> Nationalism enthroned a monarch or a leader as “bearer and embodiment of the State”.<sup>57</sup> Tillich listed less alarming demonries, intellectualism and aestheticism, with roots in the Renaissance and Enlightenment, which might be considered liberal secularism.

Religion and culture were, then, in Tillich’s view falling apart, either dramatically by crisis and confrontation, or by slow processes of erosion in Christian influence brought about by external cultural trends and a certain blindness, or arrogance, on the part of the churches with respect to the end of an age. Tillich began to construct, intellectually, a philosophical and theological system which would bring the two spheres back into fruitful contact, but in a distinctly new age.

#### *Religion and Culture: New Theories*

In 1924 Tillich had an article published in Germany on “Church and Culture”. That article, translated into English, appeared in a collection of articles and pamphlets published in 1936.<sup>58</sup> Tillich wrote a Preface in which he said that these writings provided “a summary of the problems and categories of the interpretation of history developed in German Religious Socialism”. They also explained basic ideas “of my own philosophy and theology including their application to the present world situation”.

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<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>57</sup> *Socialist Decision*, p. 31.

<sup>58</sup> *Interpretation of History*, p. vii.

The ideas expressed about Church and culture, or more widely, religion and culture, remain basic in Tillich's theology and will indeed be relevant to the attempt to sketch a new model of the institution. His 1924 article can also be considered as part of the diagnosis of the end of an age, in which recognition of the "wicked aspect of the situation in which we find ourselves" is the "first and most important sign of salvation".<sup>59</sup>

Tillich was ambivalent about both the Church and culture. He wanted a strong institution which would provide normative meaning in a culture, but he did not want that institution to delude itself into thinking that, on matters of ultimate concern, it was the ultimate, and only, custodian of that meaning (his concept of "heteronomy"). He pointed to the demonries of a secular world which, increasingly, were not confronted by effective religious questions about the consequences of their creative forces and ideologies. It was, however, from that secular world ( or autonomous culture) that he drew the critical philosophy which led him to reject orthodox supranaturalism, and the critical social and economic analysis which led him to religious socialism.

Tillich's extensive criticisms of the empirical churches have been noted. In beginning the attempt to find a way out of the "wicked aspects" of the situation as he saw it in 1924, he defined it briefly, but emphatically.

But the symbols of the Church have become strengthless. The "word" no longer sounds through its speech. Society no longer understands it. And *vice versa* the work of society has become empty, and into its vacuum powers of the anti-divine, of the untrue and unjust, have forced their way, the very powers which it wanted to escape. Its symbols are demonic rather than divine.<sup>60</sup>

The situation had to be seen in a historical perspective of centuries. The gap between church and culture had led to "the formation of profane bourgeois society and to a depreciation of the churches to an extent far surpassing even late antiquity".<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, p. 238, 239.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, p. 233.

Historical perspectives also led Tillich to a conclusion which remained a basic element in the system of thought which was being elaborated throughout his life. While the statement that “the substance of culture is religion and the form of religion is culture” has become well known to any taking an interest in that system of thought (to be noted with agreement, rejection, or mystification,) the accompanying statements are not cited very often. They are worth noting.

This is the result of our historical investigation. Church and society are one in their essential nature; for the substance of culture is religion and the form of religion is culture. In historical reality, however, church and society exist beside and against one another, though this essential relationship again and again encourages new attempts to realize pure unity, to overcome the contrast of autonomous society and heteronomous church through a theonomous community. But beyond all these tensions and battles, and shattering them, stands the act of God, which turns alike against church and society and creates the invisible congregation.<sup>62</sup>

.....  
For even theonomy is not the Kingdom of God, but only an indication of it, even if, as such, it is the meaning and goal of history. The decisive manifestation of the divine, however, can occur only where this contrast of revelation to culture and religion becomes manifest.<sup>63</sup>

These statements, looking to the future, must be set alongside the one cited at the beginning of this chapter to the effect that “our period has decided for a secular world”. How could the “invisible congregation” which seems to be the Spiritual Community, or Church, come into being? At this point, in 1924, when Tillich’s hopes, and commitments, were centred on religious socialism, which would overcome “tensions and battles” between the two spheres, his answer did not really come from a philosophy of history, but was purely theological.

There are many in society and many in the Church who can prepare the way. When there are enough and when their waiting and their action have become profound enough, then a new Kairos, a new fullness of time will have arrived.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*, p. 240.

This is as far as we can get in looking for a changed model of the Church in Tillich's thought at that time. The demonic Kairos of the Nazi regime raised many questions about "waiting" and "action". The emphasis given by Tillich in 1924 may well seem particularly passive. Lutheran conceptions of an act of God, that is the grace of God, may have been the primary influence in Tillich's formulas.

## Chapter Three

### Church, Spiritual Community and Theology

In approaching Tillich's theology in terms of his perceptions of the "end of an age", my point of departure was, more or less, the immediate aftermath of the First World War. Throughout his life, however, he was looking back, and around him, at the Christian orthodoxies which, in spite of adjustments made under the impact of the Enlightenment, he considered to be no longer viable in modern culture. At the same time, on very wide intellectual horizons, he was delineating, in a great variety of writings and lectures, the changes which would have to be made, and could be made, in the theologies of the churches in order to ensure the continuity of a Christian culture. That culture, as has been noted, could, in his judgement, disappear.

At the heart of a Christian culture stands the Church. When Tillich referred to the Church, he was frequently equating it with the orthodoxy he was attacking, or with empirical denominational institutions, with whatever confessional positions they adhered to. His own theological interpretations of the foundational event, of Christian experience, and of the human encounter with the divine, steadily developed. As they did so, questions about the institutional form for a spiritual content, transmitted from one generation to another, seemed to be left for the completion of a overarching theological system. Tillich's principal biographer reports that, at an ecumenical gathering in 1936, he "discussed his idea of a religious association or league in which men of a common mind would seek to preserve what the churches, because they had become petrified in institutionalism, could no longer keep vital".<sup>1</sup> What *did* he envisage as the institutional form for the expression of what seems at times less doctrinal belief than cultural faith?

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<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm and Marion Pauck, *Paul Tillich, His Life and Thought, Vol.I*, New York, London: Harper and Row, 1976, p. 191.

As for inherited, or transmitted spiritual content, Tillich's perception of a "latent Church", ambiguous indeed, did raise questions about the spiritual legitimacy, and the future prospects of "organized denominations".

It is not permissible to designate as "unchurched" those who have become alienated from organized denominations and traditional creeds. [...] It has often seemed to me that the "latent Church" [...] was a truer church than the organized denominations, if only because its members did not presume to possess the truth.<sup>2</sup>

In view of what we have already noted about Tillich's assessments of the churches in reality, the comment above is not surprising. Since the latent Church does not assume any form, and since the unchurched do not form any association or league, we are left with questions about the need for, and the shape of, the religious institution which Tillich still seems to consider indispensable. Indeed, his argument, as we shall see, is that the religious institution, the Church, is not just one institution among others, but the unique one which gives meaning to culture and therefore provides criteria with which to judge the functioning of society. He believes that the Church can be regenerated. The supporters of orthodoxy are just as likely to call for regeneration on their own lines, however, sometimes successfully. If the Church is regenerated in accordance with Tillich's prescriptions, how could it be a "truer church" than its invisible, or orthodox, alternatives?

We will not, of course, find a readily identifiable model. Tillich presented all the churches with fundamental questions about religion and the truth of Christianity, not suggestions about prudent modifications of dogma, or structural changes. His associate and friend at the Union Theological Seminary, Richard Niebuhr, warned readers at an early stage about their possible expectations in reading Tillich's *The Religious Situation*. Niebuhr thought that this book, first published in Germany in 1926, was the most

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<sup>2</sup> *On the Boundary*, p. 67.

important attempt in that period to assess the orientation of thought and life from a religious perspective.

It is not a book about the religion of the churches, but an effort to interpret the whole contemporary situation from the point of view of one who constantly enquires what fundamental faith is expressed in the forms which civilization takes. Tillich is more interested in the religious values of secularism, of modern movements in art, science, education, and politics than in tracing tendencies within the churches or even in theology.<sup>3</sup>

Tillich did trace such tendencies in the ensuing years, of course, still not offering any one clear prescription for regeneration, or redemption. One of his students, Langdon Gilkey, a theologian who considers himself to be in “the Tillichean tradition”, in assessing the beginning and the continuation of that tradition, analyzes the context in which Tillich himself came to his conclusions about the nature and role of the Church at the end of his *Systematic Theology*.

[...] the church is an institution with a mission to, and, therefore, in history and within the cultural communities of history. Ideally (eschatologically) the church would bear, represent, express, and mediate the Spiritual Presence to the wider cultural community [...]. In actuality, because of the alienation or estrangement, both of the culture and of the church, no such theonomy is ideally actual, nor is the Spiritual Presence anything but fragmentary, even in the church. The present church, therefore, is suffused with ambiguity as well as with grace, and it must await its own redemption before it can fulfill fully its own historical task.<sup>4</sup>

In coming to his tentative conclusions about the Church, Tillich emphasized various considerations about its nature. It was, above all, in its origins, a group of people grasped by and expressing a new reality which they had encountered. That it was also institutionalized religion, had hierarchical authority and was an organisation in society were secondary attributes.<sup>5</sup> Lest we conclude that the latter attributes were simply those of any organized group, we have to take into account other passages in which explicit

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<sup>3</sup> *The Religious Situation*, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> *Gilkey on Tillich*, New York: Crossroad, 1990, p.190.

<sup>5</sup> *Systematic Theology*, Vol.III, p. 315.

creeds and structures are attributes of a quite different organized group. In the early period in Germany, his reflections were along these lines.

During that time I came to understand the value of objective statements like denominational creeds. If a community gives general recognition to a confessional foundation whose meaning transcends subjective belief or doubt, it will hold together even while allowing room for tendencies toward doubt, criticism and uncertainty.<sup>6</sup>

At a later period, he realized that structure and authority had purposes beyond the maintenance of a group identity. He regretted the fact that “the lack of an independent authority in Protestantism” made it almost impossible “for it to be independent of the state” or of “the interests of a special social group”.<sup>7</sup>

Tillich’s approach to definition of the nature of the Church obviously had a base in anthropology, sociology and psychology relevant to religion in general. To these elements in analysis he added his own philosophical, existentialist, historical and theological perspectives. Since he also advocated deliteralization in the interpretation of the Bible and thought that in his own Protestant tradition the greatest unsolved problem was the nature of the Church, it is not surprising that he had difficulty reaching conclusions about a unique, and amazingly durable, cultural and historical phenomenon. Nevertheless, he maintained his own criteria for analysis.

It is impossible for me to understand how we could ever come to a philosophical understanding of religions without finding a point in the structure of man as man in which the finite and the infinite meet or are within each other.<sup>8</sup>

In response to criticism that he ignored the Bible, he replied that, on the contrary, the human situation revealed in the New Testament confirmed his existential analysis.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *On the Boundary*, p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> *The Protestant Era*, p. 228, 229.

<sup>8</sup> *A History of Christian Thought*, p. 527.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p. 524.

## *Church and Spiritual Community*

With these prefatory considerations in mind about Tillich's perceptions of spiritual reality which he was attempting to systematize, we have to turn to specific definitions at the centre of his intention to provide a bridge between traditional Christian thought and an increasingly skeptical secular Western culture. On the religious side, the Spiritual Community, and, on the secular side, the Theonomous Culture, their common elements and interactions, were at the centre of Tillich's mediatory structure of philosophy and theology. The Church was the formal ecclesiastical institution, repository of creeds, and organizer of liturgy and works, within which the Spiritual Community held a central, but indeterminate, place. Culture in general outside the Church was not necessarily receptive to the impact of the Spiritual Presence which animated the Community within the Church. Part of it, still outside the Church, could be open to that influence and, therefore, in Tillich's categories "theonomous", perceiving, and acting within a divine law of human conduct.

From both social and spiritual perspectives, there are six distinct spheres to which Tillich applies his theology.

(1) The Church, in its various denominational forms, in addition to the functions already noted, is a religious institution attempting to carry out a normative role in society with respect to morals and dogmatic belief. The Spiritual Community within it, may, or may not, in particular periods, have a dominant and dynamic role in interpreting and acting upon a foundational faith. The Church, like all institutions, can be corrupted by arrogance of power, even to the point of exerting what Tillich describes as a demonic influence on society.

(2) The Spiritual Community, as seen within churches now, is the bearer of spiritual being, even in a fragmentary way, understood in relation to the fullness of being exemplified in Jesus, as Messiah, and in relation to traditional and Scriptural understanding of truth, the word of God, or Logos.

(3) The Spiritual Community as it could be in a regenerated Church, would act on a prophetic imperative to "fulfill its own historical task", to borrow the language

of Langdon Gilkey, commenting on Tillich. It is in this sphere, of course, that, using more mundane language, we are looking for a model.

(4) In culture, or society generally, that part outside of the Church which feels the impact of the Spiritual Presence and is described by Tillich as theonomous has close links with the Spiritual Community. It is variously referred to as latent, invisible, or un-churched.

(5) Tillich recognizes also that those circles in autonomous culture which are not aware of any such Presence have an indispensable creative role not incompatible with the essential truth manifested by Spiritual Community or theonomous culture. In both this sphere and in (4) there could be hostility towards the institutional Church.

(6) Finally, there are all those aspects of increasingly secularist and autonomous culture which alarmed Tillich, as we noted in examining his sense of the end of an age. Those were rationalism, scientism, materialism leading to purely technological objectives, ideological manipulation and an abyss empty of spiritual meaning.

At one end of this spectrum, therefore, we are warned of the danger of heteronomous institutional absolutism, confident that it holds all the keys to spiritual meaning, and, at the other end, warned of an abyss with no framework or substance of spiritual meaning.

Within this underlying tension which is evident throughout Tillich's exposition of a new theological system there is also evident a constant balancing between two poles with respect to the profile of a new model of the Church. Depending on which phase of the argument we are considering, one pole may seem almost to be an appeal to nostalgic conservatism defined in terms of sacramental meaning and Catholic substance. We would have some of the grand lines of Christian thought from "Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism", coloured by artistic and devotional expressions of mystical intuition. The other pole obviously is a radical liberalism in which traditional theism expressed in the theological terms of supranaturalism is fundamentally revised, the literal element in orthodox symbolism is eliminated, the existential situation is defined psychologically and the Church becomes more an expression of culture than a

supranatural judge of it. Let us begin by noting how Tillich defines some of the familiar main elements in Christian thought, with citations taken mostly from the concluding volume of his *Systematic Theology*.

### *Familiar Foundations*

Tillich proposes an initial definition of the Church in the ontological language of New Being.

As long as they are churches and related in reception and reaction to the New Being in Jesus as the Christ, the Spiritual Presence works in them, and symptoms of this work can always be seen. This is the case most conspicuously in the movements of prophetic criticism and reformation to which we have already referred [...] the churches are holy because of the holiness of their foundations, the New Being which is present in them.<sup>10</sup>

Christ, the Messiah, so the exposition proceeds, is the decisive embodiment of the New Being for humankind in history. His spirit is possessed by the divine Spirit and, therefore, God is in Him.<sup>11</sup> The divine Spirit then enables Peter to recognize the Messiah as the embodiment of the New Being.<sup>12</sup> Peter is then the first leader of the Spiritual Community, the appearance of which in history is determined by the revelation of New Being in Jesus as Christ. That Community is not, however, identical with the Christian churches.<sup>13</sup> Tillich develops the theological basis for the “daring courage of the Christian faith” that it is both “rooted in time and based in the universal center of the manifestations of the Kingdom of God in history”, and “calls Jesus as the Christ the central manifestation of the divine Logos”.<sup>14</sup>

Tillich’s theology is, undoubtedly, contested page by page by other Christian theologians. Since we are not engaged either in comparative theology, or a theological critique, the excerpts from *Systematic Theology* provided above are intended only to

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<sup>10</sup> *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III, p. 168.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 367.

indicate the use made by him of familiar elements in Christian discourse, the beginning, perhaps, of a Tillichean catechism for faithful people. The theological argument, of course, is firmly set within a historical, cultural and philosophical context. Tillich refers to the “Christ-event” and it has to be defined in that context.

The period-creating events can be sudden, dramatic and widespread, as in the Reformation, or they can be slow, undramatic, and restricted to small groups, as in the Renaissance. In each case the consciousness of western Europe has seen in these events the beginning of a new period, and it is impossible to confirm or to deny this view by research into the events themselves. In the same way it is impossible to discuss the historical centrality of the event of Jesus as the Christ by positive or negative arguments based on new discoveries about the historical circumstances of this event. Something happened which for two thousand years has induced people to see in it, in terms of existential significance, the boundary between the two main periods of human history.<sup>15</sup>

To return to the theme of familiar and traditional elements of belief, how is the Bible presented? Tillich’s definition, typically, is balanced between emphasizing centrality and limiting the implications of centrality. The Bible is the Spirit’s most important medium of communication in the Western tradition but is not the only one. It is not always such a medium.<sup>16</sup> It communicates the Word of God only if its message enters into the spirit of the reader, or hearer, on matters of ultimate concern. It is still an ultimate criterion which cannot contradict the faith and love of the New Being manifested in Jesus Christ.<sup>17</sup> The Bible, however, cannot provide “an objective criterion for a movement of reformation, since the Bible must be interpreted”.<sup>18</sup>

If “movement of reformation” is understood as the contemporary regeneration which Tillich, as we have noted, considered neither inevitable nor impossible, is there any objective criterion to determine the direction of regeneration and to avoid the risk of error? There are two parts in Tillich’s answer.

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p. 331.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p. 185.

This risk is inherent in the life of any church which puts itself not above but beneath the Cross of the Christ, i.e. in every church in which the prophetic protestant principle has not been engulfed in hierarchical or doctrinal absolutism.<sup>19</sup>

[...] it is the prophetic Spirit which creates the courage for such a risk [...] even if it may mean the disintegration of particular churches. It takes the risk in the certainty that the Spiritual Community, the dynamic essence of a church, cannot be destroyed.<sup>20</sup>

The “Kingdom of God” also takes its place within discourse about familiar foundations, in spite of the fact that over centuries of Christian reflection its interpretation has varied all the way from the violent imposition of a social order by revolutionary sects to rewards for the just in heaven. In rejecting the transcendental view of history and its “Manichaeic danger”, Tillich provided a succinct definition of the Kingdom.

Finally, this view interprets the symbol of the Kingdom of God as a static supernatural order into which individuals enter after their death—instead of understanding the symbol, with the biblical writers, as a dynamic power for the coming of which we pray in the Lord’s Prayer and which, according to biblical thought, is struggling with the demonic forces which are powerful in churches as well as empires.<sup>21</sup>

Although rejecting a transcendental view of history, Tillich accepts a “transhistorical side”, or dimension, in explaining the Kingdom of God and the meaning of history. He discusses the Kingdom along with two other “symbols”, the Spiritual Presence and Eternal Life.

Nevertheless, the connotations of the symbol of the Kingdom of God are more embracing than those of the two others. This is a consequence of the double character of the Kingdom of God. It has an inner-historical and a transhistorical side.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 356.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, p. 357.

Two pages later in this section of his *Systematic Theology*, “History and the Kingdom of God”, Tillich, having rejected a transcendental view of the meaning of history, stipulates that the Kingdom “must be immanent and transcendent at the same time”.<sup>23</sup> How he reconciles his references to “transcendental view” with “transcendent” in these passages is not apparent to me. Finally, with regard to the Kingdom Tillich states that the Spiritual Community is not the Kingdom of God.<sup>24</sup> Presumably, in its “inner-historical” presence the Kingdom consists of tangible manifestations in human affairs of the consequences of the operations of faith and love achieved by a Spiritual Community and a theonomous culture.

Having noted Tillich’s way of presenting some of the familiar foundations of Christian thought, with regard to the Messiah, the Bible and the Kingdom of God, let us return first to the Church, the visible institution, then to the Spiritual Community and then to the relations between the two. Some basic distinctions have been noted but we need a sharper focus on details in trying to define new models and the interactions between the Church as a whole and its environmental culture. As Tillich frequently warned his readers, attempts to deal with religion, spirituality and secularity at the same time were fraught with ambiguity and possible confusion.

Every church is a sociological reality. As such it is subject to the laws which determine the life of social groups with ambiguities. [...] Seen in this light, the the history of the churches is a secular history with all the disintegrating, destructive and tragic-demonic elements which make historical life ambiguous.<sup>25</sup>

In carrying out their particular tasks as religious institutions, without immunity from the risks and mistakes of other institutions and organizations in society, the churches must accept the fact that no church office, hierarchy or structure has been

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p. 359.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 165.

commanded by the Holy Spirit. Temptations toward absolutism and claims to infallibility can become demonic in their consequences. Self-criticism, far from weakening faith and confidence, can be the greatest strength.<sup>26</sup> Particular “institutions, doctrines, ritual and devotional activities or ethical principles” cannot claim the same degree or type of holiness as that faith in New Being which animates the Spiritual Community.<sup>27</sup> Tillich continues this central argument about the application of the Protestant principle by expressing dismay about profanization..

How could it happen that there is so much profanization of the holy in church history, in both of the senses of profanization, i.e., by ritualization and by secularization? The first distortion happens more often in Catholic, the second more often in Protestant, types of Christianity.<sup>28</sup>

As he continues this line of attack on the church as religious institution, however, the inconsistencies and gaps even in this highly articulated system, begin to become apparent. He attributes a vulnerability to profanization by secularization on the part of Protestants and also great strength from self-criticism. Secularization and self-criticism within the Church are not synonymous, as Tillich would certainly argue. They are not synonymous in theory but in fact, in modern society, a great deal of the most effective criticism of the churches has come from sources outside the churches, including, presumably, an indefinable segment of culture considered “theonomous” by Tillich and given a semi-religious status. Who draws the line between theonomous influence from outside pointing out to the churches the errors of their ways and secular profanization coming also from outside? Does the Spiritual Community do so, or is it the visible Church, or do the two come together, united against error? Tillich seems to hold the visible Church responsible for “institutions, doctrines, ritual and devotional activities, ethical principles”, while warning against undue divinization of these operations.

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<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p. 206-208.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p. 379.

The same questions arise when Tillich moves from an attack on “magical distortion of the sacramental experience” and “non-personal acts of magical technique”, devoid of any “centered act of faith”<sup>29</sup> to warnings about “the miracle of ecstasy created by the Spiritual Presence when this is understood as inviting the destruction of the structure of spirit in man”<sup>30</sup> or “subjective intoxication”<sup>31</sup>. If the operations, or distortions in perceiving a Spiritual Presence lead to such dangers then it is the visible Church, with an authority conferred upon it, or accepted by its members, which takes remedial action. A Presbyterian Council of clergy and lay elders would be as decisive in acting against what it perceived as secular profanization or subjective intoxication as any bishop of the Roman, Orthodox or Anglican churches. The Church within which the Spiritual Community resides is not simply a protective shell, an administrative apparatus, or a passive custodian of dogma for that Community.

Tillich himself frequently lends support to that last point, when he is not engaged in making distinctions between Church and Sacred Community. Against anyone claiming to be Christian but refusing association with the Church, Tillich pointed out that “he is dependent on the tradition of the Church for every word, every symbol that he might use in prayer in contemplation or mystical experience. Without the community of speaking, there is no speaking whatever, and without an inner speaking there is no spiritual life whatever.”<sup>32</sup> All of this applies, of course, to the Spiritual Community as Tillich describes it. It is difficult to imagine a “community of speaking”, however, in which distinctions were made between members of the Community and everyone else in the Church. It also seems clear that Tillich did not advocate autonomous and separated Spiritual Communities. He thought that any attempt to fix the content of the Spirit’s

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>32</sup> *A History of Christian Thought*, p. 477-478.

teaching in the form suitable to small, separated communities would lead to spiritual poverty or some form of rational moralism. He gave the Quakers as an example.<sup>33</sup>

These comments about gaps and inconsistencies may be unfair to Tillich or may be the consequence of overlooking some aspect of his extensive theological apologetics. They do indicate the importance, however, of looking carefully at what he does say about the Spiritual Community in relation to the Church generally.

In a quotation above about the Bible as criterion (page 8), the Spiritual Community is referred to as the dynamic and indestructible essence of a church. In another passage in which Tillich expressed doubt as to whether universal church union will ever become “empirically true” he still was confident that the faithful believer “will be grasped by the power of the words in which the unambiguous side of the Church, the Spiritual Community, is expressed”.<sup>34</sup> As dynamic essence and unambiguous side of the Church, the term Spiritual Community would seem to be another more or less mystical explanation of the nature of the Church to add to a rich lore of traditional ecclesiology. It would be the Church, or some members of it, receptive to a revelation of the authority of God, not to be “legally defined”, not to be “put into the fences of doctrines and rituals”, only to be grasped by those open to that revelation. That divine presence and authority is the “reality which breaks again and again through the established forms” of a lower level of ecclesiastical authority.<sup>35</sup> It is the prophetic Spirit breaking through, even if “latent or even repressed over long stretches of history”.<sup>36</sup>

Tillich, in asserting his confidence that Protestantism, in spite of “endless denominational cleavages” would remain “a community of faith”, adds to our definitions by referring to “the two realities” in which that community participates, “the Spiritual

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Systematic Theology*, Vol.III, p. 172.

<sup>35</sup> *The New Being*, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1955.

<sup>36</sup> *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III, p. 370.

Community which is its dynamic essence and its existence within the ambiguities of religion".<sup>37</sup>

The churches, from the beginning, have had ample experience of a breaking through of the Spirit as perceived by individual members or by Spirit-led groups, and of the disruption caused the *Ecclesia* thereby. Tillich added "ambiguities" and "existential reality" and "sociological reality" to the burden of the visible Church. In stressing, nevertheless, the potentiality of a dynamic and unambiguous spiritual essence breaking through in particular times and places he is presenting a familiar situation. Does he bring anything new in this sense along with the substantial theological revisions, to be noted in a later section, which do not fit the pattern of familiar foundations, and dilemmas?

In the section of the concluding volume of his *Systematic Theology* entitled "The Spiritual Presence and the New Being in the Spiritual Community" Tillich attempts both to give the Spiritual Community a traditional legitimacy and to maintain a distinction between that Community and the Church.

Such words as "body of Christ", "assembly (ecclesia) of God" or "of Christ" express the unambiguous life created by the divine Presence, in a sense similar to that of the term "Spiritual Community". Its relation to what is called "Church" or "church" in a rather equivocal terminology will be discussed later.<sup>38</sup>

Ecclesiology is linked to christology by the assertions that Christ "could not have brought the new reality without those who have accepted the new reality in him and from him", that those who accepted that reality were the founding members of the Spiritual Community and that the Community remains the manifestation of the "creative impact of the central event". With the analogy of the "body of Christ" or of an "*Ecclesia* of God" in mind, these assertions do not seem (to me) to be unduly heretical. Tillich goes on to assert, however, in the same section, that he does not intend to translate *Ecclesia* by Church in the contemporary situation.

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<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, p. 177

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, p. 149

We do not use the word “church” for the Spiritual Community, because this word has been used, of necessity, in the frame of the ambiguities of religion.<sup>39</sup>

The difficulties of understanding Tillich’s distinction between the two, except in purely theoretical terms, continues when we read about the inclusiveness of the Community. On the other hand, his concepts of the relationship of Church and culture become clearer.

The concrete occasion for the distinction between the latent and the manifest church comes with the encounter of groups outside the organized churches who show the power of the New Being in an impressive way. There are youth alliances friendship groups, educational, artistic and political movements and, even more obviously, individuals without any visible relation to each other in whom the Spiritual Presence’s impact is felt, although they are indifferent and hostile to all overt expressions of religion. They do not belong to a church, but they are not excluded from the Spiritual Community. It is impossible to deny this if one looks at the manifold instances of profanization and demonization of the Spiritual Presence in those groups—the churches—which claim to be the Spiritual Community. Certainly the churches are not excluded from the Spiritual Community, but neither are their secular opponents. The churches represent the Spiritual Community in a manifest religious self-expression, whereas the others represent the Spiritual Community in secular latency.<sup>40</sup>

The Spiritual Community is inclusive, varied in faith expressions and judges the Church.

Latent or manifest, the Spiritual Community is the community of the New Being. It is created by the divine Spirit as manifest in the New Being in Jesus as the Christ. [...] qualities inherent in its character [...] furnish the criteria for describing and judging the churches, for the churches are both the actualization and the distortion of the Spiritual Community[...]

The Spiritual Community contains an indefinite variety of expressions of faith and does not exclude any of them. It is open in all directions because it is based on the central manifestation of the Spiritual Presence.<sup>41</sup>

Having proposed a relationship between Spiritual Community and Church which would seem to imply if not schism, at least considerable tension and confusion about governance of the institution, Tillich assures readers that he is not speaking “of two churches but of two aspects of one church in time and space”.

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<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, p. 155.

If, however, these terms are so abused as to suggest two churches, the result is either a devaluation of the empirical church here and now or an ignoring of the invisible church as an irrelevant ideal. Both consequences have characterized many phases of Protestantism's history. The first consequence has appeared in certain types of Spirit-movements, the second in liberal Protestantism.<sup>42</sup>

Since Tillich does not intend to discard the empirical church in favour of a Spirit movement (for which there would obviously be no point whatsoever in writing systematic theology), what is preventing the "two aspects" of the Church from coming together in a coherent and effective way to convey the message about the Messiah of New Being? He does provide an answer. The difficulty in the concept of the community of faith is "rooted in the history of the *fides quae creditur*, the creeds". The creeds reflect "Spiritual creativity and the social forces which determine history", such as "ignorance, fanaticism, hierarchical arrogance, and political intrigue".

If the churches require that all their faithful members accept the formulas which came into existence in this way, they impose on them a burden which no one who is aware of the situation can honestly carry. It is a demonic and therefore destructive act for the community of faith to be interpreted as unconditional subjection to the doctrinal statements of faith as they have developed in the rather ambiguous history of the churches.<sup>43</sup>

The creeds, therefore, prevent the authentic voice of the Spiritual Communities from being properly heard and acted upon by Church authorities; "a secular world has established itself which fosters a critical or sceptical or indifferent attitude toward the creedal statements—even among serious members of the churches".<sup>44</sup>

With that assessment on Tillich's part we come to an end of the selection of some familiar foundations, Christ, Bible, Kingdom of God and Church (even with its intangible essence) which might assure the faithful that a new model would not, apparently, be very much different from the present one. The Spiritual Community is, in Tillich's theology, a

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<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*

dynamic essence for the Church but the familiar creedal statements in traditional theism are immutable guarantees of truth for large numbers of the faithful. The spiritual realities of faith within the churches, on which Tillich rests his concept of the Spiritual Community are true also. His expansive concepts of that Community, however, new ways of presenting familiar narratives and attempted distinctions between that Community and the visible or “empirical” Church lead into unfamiliar ground, by contrast with orthodoxy. The case he makes for those distinctions has logical gaps. We should consider the full implications of the following assertions.

Therefore the Spiritual Community in its latency is open to profanization and demonization without an ultimate principle of resistance, whereas the Spiritual Community organized as a church has the principle of resistance in itself and is able to apply it self-critically, as in the movements of prophetism and Reformation. It was the latency of the Spiritual Community under the veil of Christian humanism which led to the concept of latency, but the concept proved to possess a wider relevance. It could be applied to the whole history of religion (which is in most cases identical with the history of culture).<sup>45</sup>

Defenders of the orthodoxy attacked by Tillich could make something of the phrases “as a church” and “principle of resistance in itself”. It is in the full Church, empirical, spiritual and mystical, that formal creeds and derived beliefs have provided a principle of resistance not only to corruption requiring reformation (Tillich’s example) but to profanization and demonization to be met only with “an ultimate principle of resistance”. Tillich objected to “unconditional subjection” to particular doctrinal statements (not apparently to formal creeds in principle but this is not clear). If it is a problem of *fides quae creditur* which is preventing the Church and its Spiritual Community from entering into a harmonious relationship in a new era, then we are entitled to ask Tillich how they should be revised. He does provide the elements for a new creedal basis for the Church, to which we must now turn. It is difficult to imagine that new creedal basis becoming a catechism of belief, but then, a new model of the

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<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, p.154.

Church as envisaged by Tillich would probably place less emphasis on a catechism than on attempts to bring about the Kingdom of God.

*Being-Itself, Ground of Being, Symbols, Correlation*

In outlining Tillich's approach to familiar elements in Christian belief, I did not mention God. He said that "For theology is first of all doctrine of God".<sup>46</sup> His theology on this primal element, however, is not familiar (to many?) in the same way. Orthodox theologians might concede that parts of Tillich's doctrinal approach were familiar, but in a highly selective way which would erode, or eliminate or turn upside down inherited doctrine about a supernatural world alongside, above or in any case, beyond this world. Tillich said that he intended to replace orthodox imagery, a good part of the creeds, *fides quae creditur*, not, apparently, with a destructive intention with regard to the Church, but with the intention of regenerating the Spiritual Essence of the Church, the Spiritual Community. He claimed that his theology was in "the line of New Testament thought", "not the foundation of a new religion but the transformation of the old state of things".<sup>47</sup>

Tillich's theology on the question of God's existence, or nature, is usually summed up with references to "God as Being-Itself", or God as a symbol pointing to the "Ground of Being", to whose regenerative power human beings, with fragmentary divine being, actual or potential, can have access. In this system of belief, Christ has a unique, and pivotal role in history, since he possessed the fullness of being, was the New Being which the Spiritual Community perceived, and continues to perceive.

Since the approach to models of the Church in this analysis does not take the form of a theological critique, we can simply note the theology and consider the implications for the Church. The question for examination is rather the extent to which new

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<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, p. 243.

theological approaches shape the nature of the religious institution within society, and its relations with the cultural environment. The nature of the “Being-Itself” approach requires some definition, in Tillich’s words, for that purpose.

Tillich’s exposition of the doctrine proceeds through a number of steps. The following ones provide only brief indications of the argument in general. The first step is what he called a “phenomenological description” which would lead to an understanding of the meaning, and then the reality, of God.

“God” is the answer to the question implied in man’s finitude; he is the name for that which concerns man ultimately. This does not mean that first there is a being called God and then the demand that man should be ultimately concerned about him. It means that whatever concerns a man ultimately becomes god for him, and, conversely, it means that a man can be concerned ultimately only about that which is god for him.<sup>48</sup>

In the next step, under the same general heading, Tillich answers the secularist objections to any theory about God, that “the gods are simply imaginary projections of elements of finitude, natural and human elements”.

What these theories disregard is that projection always is projection *on* something—a wall, a screen, another being, another realm. Obviously, it is absurd to class that on which projection is realized with the projection itself. A screen is not projected; it receives the projection. The realm against which the divine images are projected is not itself a projection. It is the experienced ultimacy of being and meaning. It is the realm of ultimate concern.<sup>49</sup>

The power of being in its completeness and the entire sum of meanings and values are seen without differentiation and conflict in the ground of being and meaning, in the source of all values.<sup>50</sup>

After these introductory explanations, Tillich comes to distinctions between religious experience and philosophical concepts.

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<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, p. 226.

It means that the openness of being-itself, which is given in the basic religious experience, is the foundation for the philosophical grasp of the structure of being. This origin of the ultimate philosophical notions explains the fact that they have had and still have tremendous influence on the development of the religious ideas about God, both supporting them and conflicting with them, and affecting religious experience as well as theological conceptualization.<sup>51</sup>

The being of God is being-itself. The being of God cannot be understood as the existence of a being alongside others or above others. If God is a being, he is subject to the categories of finitude, especially to space and substance. Even if he is called the “highest being” in the sense of the “most perfect” and the “most powerful” being, this situation is not changed. When applied to God, superlatives become diminutives.<sup>52</sup>

These passages are, perhaps, less revealing of how Tillich defines God than what he discards. In the same pages from which the above extracts are drawn, he refers to elements in “monarchic monotheism”, still influenced by polytheism, which stand in marked contrast to his own austere “being-itself” theory: “The ‘Lord of Hosts’ of whom the Old Testament and Christian liturgy often speak is a monarch who rules over heavenly beings, angels, and spirits”. He does not assert, here at least, that the dogmatic orthodox creeds which he believes stand in the way of regeneration of the Church are limited to “monarchic monotheism”. Nor is he prepared to place his own theology, it appears, in an alternative “mystical monotheism” although the language of that system to which he refers comes very close to his own terms in arguing a case for religious experience explained by philosophical concepts.<sup>53</sup>

It might be assumed, even from the brief excerpts provided, that the approach of Tillich to defining the central doctrine would constitute a sufficient shock to Christian thought that the whole system would be considered heretical. The role of Jesus, as the Christ, presented as New Being, the unique example of the fullness of meaning of the Ground of Being, at a pivotal point in history, still does not fit very easily into the

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<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, p.226.

traditional narrative of the Son of God descending from Heaven and entering human history by means of a Virgin Birth.

How much survives of Trinitarian monotheism? In his system as a whole, Tillich does attempt to retain as much as possible of the conceptual structure of orthodoxy and tradition. With regard to the Holy Trinity, he devoted a chapter in his *Systematic Theology* to what was, in effect, an exploration of how the earliest doctrines, and then the developed orthodox ones, could be adapted to his system. He thought that an earlier Protestant revisionist, Schleiermacher, had taken “an important step in the direction of an existential understanding” of the doctrine, by putting it at the end of his system. Karl Barth, said Tillich, had made a mistake by putting it at the beginning, a doctrine which fell from heaven, “the heaven of an unmediated biblical and ecclesiastical authority”.<sup>54</sup> Tillich concluded his own chapter with a reflection which is not very surprising to a reader who has tried to understand his theology about God.

The doctrine of the Trinity is not closed. It can be neither discarded nor accepted in its traditional form. It must be kept open in order to fulfil its original function—to express in embracing symbols the self-manifestation of the Divine Life to man.<sup>55</sup>

A conservative theologian would be entitled to raise questions about how the word “self” could be applied to a symbolic God or even more to a Ground of Being. Pursuing such questions, however, lies beyond the scope or purpose of the thesis. We have to return to the question of how such theology might help to determine the shape of the empirical Church, as it would appear to, and interact with, society in general.

How was Tillich’s theology received within the churches? As the introductory chapter states, the analysis of a model guided by that theology begins with the presupposition that Tillich has exerted a substantial influence, first in Protestant circles in

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<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, p. 285.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, p. 294.

North America and then in wider circles of Christian thought in Europe and elsewhere. The last volume of that theology was published in 1963, almost at the end of his life, but the tributes to his contribution to new thinking about Church and culture began several decades before that. That his contribution was welcomed by the Protestant theologians who had invited him to New York was not surprising. As already noted, one of them, Richard Niebuhr, was impressed by the depth and relevance of Tillich's analysis of the religious situation following the First World War (page 3).

Although critical of particular directions which liberal Protestantism had taken in Germany in the nineteenth century, Tillich was in a direct line of development from the Protestant revisionism, in reaction to the Enlightenment, which had begun with Schleiermacher. His associates at the Union Theological Seminary were equally open to change, although their approaches were different from those of Tillich. They were struck by the novel combination of German philosophies, European existentialism and a Lutheran heritage of individual spiritual experience and the grace of God which they found in the system which Tillich was developing.

That system, as it became known, also aroused suspicion, concern and hostility among conservative theologians, Protestant and Roman Catholic. Even there, however, it became apparent that Tillich's comprehensive combination of familiar and unfamiliar elements in Christian thought could not easily be disregarded, or contested. In one of the first reactions to the completion of the *Systematic Theology* in 1963, an author representing conservative theology, more or less that of Karl Barth (considered by Tillich to be "neo-orthodox") examined all aspects of that system including, of course, the central doctrine of God as "Being-Itself".

The author, Alexander McKelway, expressed agreement with Tillich on points such as the symbolic nature of all finite terms applied to God, the belief that the development in human ideas about God did not imply an evolution in God's revelation of

himself, and that ontology was a more adequate basis, closer to Christian thought, or philosophical anthropology, than contemporary materialism or empiricism. McKelway also said that “being-itself”, among other attributes, could certainly be used with reference to God. He then parted company with Tillich on whether the doctrine of God came from a philosophical concept, or from revelation.

The thing that is most striking about Tillich’s doctrine of God is that nowhere are his assertions said to be based upon God’s acts as they are revealed in Christ, still less are they based on any exegesis of the record of those acts in Holy Scripture. In fact, at only one place in this doctrine is the character of the divine life said to be “manifest in revelation”. In this situation is there not bound to arise in the reader’s mind a suspicion that the content of Tillich’s doctrine of God is deduced from his analysis of being rather than received from revelation itself?<sup>56</sup>

“Revelation” as used by Tillich is obviously not “revelation” used by Barth. The issue remains unresolved, but the case made by the former for his approach had clearly entered into the mainstream of Christian thought.

Among some Roman Catholic theologians in North America the reaction to Tillich can be noted in two phases. In 1964 a collection of essays appeared examining the main elements in Tillich works. The essays as a whole were characterized by other Roman Catholic theologians thirty years later as demonstrating hesitation and caution about expressing agreement with a Protestant theologian.<sup>57</sup> In 1994, those contributing to

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<sup>56</sup> *The Systematic Theology of Paul Tillich, A Review and Analysis*, New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1964. McKelway had been a student under the direction of Karl Barth. Tillich said that the book was “very fair and clear” and “an excellent introduction to my theology”. Barth contributed an “introductory report”, judged Tillich to be “in his own way, a great theologian”, affirmed his own view about the “inarguable dubiousness” of the new system, whose propositions “give rise to the “gravest suspicions”. McKelway said that Tillich was the “foremost American theologian” whose theology offered “one of the two or three most distinct and important directions of contemporary theology”. He also said that some of Tillich’s propositions were baffling. The quotation above is from pp. 140, 141, the general assessment of Tillich’s doctrine of God on pp.136-143

<sup>57</sup> Thomas A. O’Meara, Celestin Weisser, eds., *Paul Tillich in Catholic Thought*, Dubuque, Iowa: Priory Press, 1964.

a similar project had no hesitation in stating, in the words of one of the editors, that Tillich's thought "continues to influence Catholic theology today".

Tillich's deep concern for the integration of theology with philosophy, as well as his efforts to correlate revelation with culture, were immediately attractive to Catholic theologians of the 1960's and still continue to fascinate their successors today.<sup>58</sup>

The editor, Raymond Bulman, attributed the increasing influence of Tillich to developing currents of thought among Catholics about the importance of theological pluralism, feminism, globalism and liberation. To these newer concerns, he added symbolism and sacramentality, mysticism and spirituality, about which there could be a fruitful ecumenical dialogue.

It need hardly be pointed out the contributors wrote as individuals, not representing any part of the Roman Catholic Church in an ecclesiastical sense. The Protestants who had expressed support earlier for Tillich's ideas also had spoken as individuals, although it seems that their support had a more direct effect within the seminaries of Protestant denominations even in Tillich's lifetime, and, therefore, an eventual influence on church leaders. If we think of Tillich's distinction between Church and Spiritual Community, then it might be said that Tillich contributed to the development of an informal ecumenical theological community, which was also essential for the regeneration of a Church embodying Protestant principle and Catholic substance.

In the light of what has been reported about Tillich's doctrine of God, what can be said about the creeds which he saw as a great barrier to reintegration of Church and Spiritual Community and which might not accommodate his central doctrine? He did refer to particular creeds, not apparently to the possibility of having any revised dogmatic formulations as a general guide for a new model of the Church. He objected to a requirement for acceptance of particular formulas of belief as a condition of membership,

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<sup>58</sup> Raymond Bulman and Frederick Parrella, eds., *Paul Tillich, a New Catholic Assessment*, Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1994, p.308.

and, more importantly, for salvation. Behind creeds, however, continuing theological positions defining those conditions would make impossible the formal acceptance of Tillich's theology, even as a guide, if not its influence in many sectors of Church teaching. The comments of McKelway, and of Barth, define the gap on "revelation".

In the 1994 essays by Roman Catholic writers, Langdon Gilkey, a student, colleague and friend of Tillich, was invited to contribute a "Protestant response". In his essay, Gilkey commented on one obvious difficulty about proceeding towards a Tillichean model of the Church.

Tillich's model of the Church is sacramental and Catholic, or model of a theonomous symbol. Ecclesiologically, however, as this analysis shows, it is a radical interpretation indeed in relation to traditional Catholic ecclesiology. I think these articles well understood these points, though the Enlightenment roots of the Protestant principle may seem unsettling! These articles stress over and over that Catholic Christianity is always in danger of idolatry, and they continuously turn, as an antidote to idolatry, to Tillich's concepts of symbol, theonomy and sacrament.<sup>59</sup>

The difficulty is not simply one of ecclesiology, however. The divine mandate given to the ecclesia required traditionally that it should defend permanently the very interpretations of the Gospel which Tillich refers to as creeds. Tillich was well aware of the difficulties, proposed to eliminate what he summed up as "superworld", and required an extensive process of rethinking as a condition for regeneration. He did not propose to eliminate the creeds but to subject them to continuing examination from contemporary perspectives. His reference to Schleiermacher's important step towards an existential understanding of Trinitarian doctrine (page 21) indicates his own advice to Christians and potential Christians: test traditional understanding of the appearance of Christ in history by questions derived from contemporary thought, in existentialism, philosophy, psychology and critical reason. His advice, or invitation, to potential Christians was directed at least to the theonomous part of a largely secular culture. His doctrine of God

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<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, p. 304.

seems to mean that the religious experience to which Tillich refers was almost as likely be found in theonomous culture as in Spiritual Community and Church.

Tillich was always balancing reassuring and familiar elements of inherited Christian thought against what Gilkey called the unsettling impact of the Enlightenment and Protestantism. Before turning to what a new model of Church, as a religious institution, would do, and stand for, in society generally, we should note two sets of internal doctrinal issues not really dealt with so far. Tillich's theories of "correlation" and "symbolism" are on the unsettling impact side of the balance; "sacramentality" and "spirituality" are on the reassuring side.

In his introduction to Volume I of *Systematic Theology*, Tillich said that, as between a traditional *summa* which dealt with all actual and many potential problems, and an essay, which dealt explicitly with one actual problem, his system lay between the two. It was intended "to deal with a group of *actual* problems which demand a solution in a special situation". "Today", he said, "a need for systematic form has arisen in view of the chaos of our spiritual life and the impossibility of creating a *summa*".<sup>60</sup> The systematic form had to have "methodological rationality" and the first step was to explain "the method of correlation".

Systematic theology uses the method of correlation. It has always done so, sometimes more, sometimes less, consciously, and must do so consciously and outspokenly, especially if the apologetic point of view is to prevail. The method of correlation explains the contents of the Christian faith through existential questions and theological answers in mutual interdependence.<sup>61</sup>

Even disregarding Tillich's assurance that theology has always followed this method, there does not appear to be anything very unsettling for the Church in the way it is presented. As always with Tillich, however, it is essential in considering the

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<sup>60</sup> *Systematic Theology, Vol. I*, p. 59.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, p. 60.

plausibility of his preferred solution to “actual problems” to consider what he intends to reject in doing so. He intended to replace “three inadequate methods of relating the contents of the Christian faith to man’s spiritual existence”.

The first of these methods can be called “supranaturalistic in that it takes the Christian message to be a sum of revealed truths which have fallen into the human situation like strange bodies from a strange world”. “But man cannot receive answers to questions he has never asked”. The second method is “naturalistic” or “humanistic”. “It develops its answer out of human existence, unaware that human existence itself *is* the question. Much of liberal theology in the last two centuries was “humanistic” in this sense. The third method can be called “dualistic”, “inasmuch as it builds a supranatural structure on a natural substructure. This method requires confidence in “self-contradictory” expressions such as “natural revelation” or arguments for the “existence of God”.<sup>62</sup>

In place of these methods, Tillich proposes correlation, “existential questions and theological answers”, used in three ways. In the first place, it refers to “correspondence between religious symbols and that which is symbolized by them”, the “central problem of religious knowledge”. The second use involves correlation “in the logical sense between concepts of the human and those denoting the divine”. This use would determine the nature of statements about God and the world, “for example, the correlation of the infinite and the finite”. The third use requires “correlation in the factual sense between man’s ultimate concern and that about which he is ultimately concerned”. This use “qualifies the divine-human relationship within religious experience”.<sup>63</sup>

Tillich refers to correlation in two different contexts. We can read these definitions as methodological explanations of terms he intends to use in *Systematic*

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<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, p. 64,65.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, p. 60,61.

*Theology*. In this and in other works, correlation theory reduced to “existential questions and theological answers” is intended as assurance to human beings of access to God, as “Being-Itself”, in a “religious experience”.<sup>64</sup> It then seems either to interpret, or replace, meditation, or prayer, or a mystical encounter. On the other hand, sometimes it seems to be used at a non-religious level, in which it is the relevance (or irrelevance) of Christian knowledge, or wisdom, to human concerns which is at issue. Presumably the concerns have to be “ultimate”.

The third use of correlation referring to a “divine-human relationship” and “religious experience” evoked a protest from Karl Barth and others on the ground that “divine-human correlation makes God partly dependent on men”. Tillich had a theological response: “although God in his abysmal nature is in no way dependent on man, God in his self-manifestation to man is dependent on the way man receives his manifestation”. “The divine-human relation is a correlation”; as encounter, it “means something real for both sides”. Tillich quoted Luther, “As you believe him, so you have him”, in support of his use of correlation.<sup>65</sup>

While the theological intricacies of this disagreement cannot be pursued here, there is one aspect of the difference between the two sets of correlations (Tillich’s and the inadequate ones) which is clear and relevant to the question of possibly unsettling changes for the Church as it is, or as an indication of new spiritual dispensations in the future. The three methods which Tillich considered no longer appropriate depend on two types of knowledge, supernatural and natural. The former is derived from revelation, recorded in Scripture, mediated by the Church and could include a theology of natural law. The latter is derived from human experience and defined by social consensus. The

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<sup>64</sup> There are variations of this formula which do not seem, to the lay reader, to add to, or subtract from the one cited: e.g. philosophical questions and theological answers, or questions and answers at the finite, or existential level, seeking a final answer at the unconditional or divine level.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, p. 61.

individual is still free to seek assurance of his, or her, “being” in a direct divine-human encounter (Tillich’s third use of correlation) but questions and “answers” should presumably, in traditional thinking, take into account communitarian or social collective knowledge and consensus.

Except for the reference to symbols in Tillich’s definitions, the emphasis seems to lie very strongly on individual seeking and experience. This is certainly not a new phenomenon in the history of the churches. If an emphasis on collective knowledge, in the two senses defined above, seems to Tillich, “inadequate”, however, then does an individualist emphasis in a new era of Spiritual Community and a closely linked theonomous culture not assume wider proportions and present difficulties for the concepts of Church and shared beliefs?

### *Symbolism*

The Church, and what I have described as its “familiar foundations”, Messiah, Bible and Kingdom of God, belong to Christianity generally. The doctrine of God as Being-Itself and the theories of correlation can be considered as Tillich’s further adaptation of what Langdon Gilkey called Enlightenment/ Protestant revisionism (particularly in relation to ecclesiology). A third element in Tillich’s adaptation, relevant to the profile of a new model of the Church, is the emphasis on symbolism. After that, we can return to what Tillich hoped would continue to be common to all churches, “Catholic substance”, in sacraments, sacramentality and spirituality.

Tillich provided six examples of what he meant by correlation, three now “inadequate” and three closely linked to his doctrine of God in a new theological system. Symbolism in that system is also closely linked to that doctrine. It is not a new element in Christian thought or in religious thought generally. Its importance in Tillich’s theology is relative to the disappearance of literal understanding of the miraculous assertions of orthodox dogma. The symbolical, mythical and legendary dimensions of meaning take

their place, along with empirical, historically verifiable, and existential realities, and with philosophical concepts of ultimate reality and religious experience.

The truth of a religious symbol has nothing to do with the truth of the empirical assertions involved in it, be they physical, psychological, or historical. A religious symbol possesses some truth if it adequately expresses the correlation or revelation in which some person stands. A religious symbol is true if it adequately expresses the correlation of some person with final revelation. A religious symbol can die only if the correlation of which it is adequate expression dies.<sup>66</sup>

The nature, and effect, of symbols, religious or non-religious, could be debated endlessly. The point most immediately relevant to what was said about correlation, and to the profile of a Church, is the emphasis on individual experience, that of “some person”. Tillich’s view of religious symbols does not, of course, exclude a shared belief and a mass effect produced by the symbolic power of faith in a miraculous Incarnation. His doctrine of God makes the sacred name “God” itself the ultimate symbol for an unconditional Ground of Being. This must be one of the *fides quae creditur* for the Spiritual Community.

Tillich’s point in the citation above is, however, that for any individual a symbol is *true* only if “correlated” to revelation, a small window to a larger, and reassuring, reality, or part of the existential question and the unconditional answer. If many individuals in the Community have that experience, then the belief is shared. If some do not, yet, they accept the possibility that it can occur. Individual experience still remains a primary consideration. The other aspect of Tillich’s presentation of symbolism, along with legend and myth, is that the language, and the ideas, are more palatable to the people in what he sees as theonomous culture than are inherited concepts, established as dogma. A thoroughly secular culture, of course, could not take seriously, or create, a religious symbol as such. That culture could still be “creative” in his analysis of the different segments of culture outside the Church and the Spiritual Community.

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<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*, p. 240.

*Catholic Substance, Sacraments, Sacramentality and Spirituality*

In requiring “Catholic substance” within the Spiritual Community of a regenerated Church, Tillich was referring primarily to “consciousness of presence” of God, to an awareness of the Church as a whole as a sacrament, and to particular sacraments used in worship.

In writing in his *Systematic Theology* about the Kingdom of God and hope for its realization in the affairs of the world, Tillich warns against utopian expectations, even expectations of limited gains, if the bearers “ignore the given, but fragmentary, presence of the Kingdom”.

The implications of this for the churches as representatives of the Kingdom of God in history is that it is their task to keep alive the tension between the consciousness of presence and the expectation of the coming. The danger for the receptive (sacramental) churches is that they will emphasize the presence and neglect the expectation; and the danger for the activist (prophetic) churches is that they will emphasize the expectation and neglect the consciousness of the presence.<sup>67</sup>

The difference between “receptive” and “activistic” churches cannot simply be equated with differences between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches on one side and Protestant churches generally on the other, particularly in this century, and particularly since Tillich’s death in 1965. The Lutheran Church in Germany was tragically receptive and not prophetic at all when faced with pagan Nazism, even if sacramental and pious in its own way. Particular Roman Catholic Churches in the Soviet bloc before 1989 and in Latin America have taken political positions in accordance with what Tillich seems to mean by “prophetic” demand. This was done not only to defend the religious and sacramental identity of the institution but on wider issues of freedom.

Tillich, going back to the Reformation and observing the realities of all churches

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<sup>67</sup> *Systematic Theology, Vol. III*, p. 391.

of his own day, was, of course, raising a fundamental issue about the nature of the Church and its role in history. As we have noted, he considered that issue to have been left unresolved by the sixteenth century Reformers. He extended that criticism, further and logically, with respect to the sacraments.

No other question in Protestantism has from the beginning offered so much difficulty as has the question of sacraments, and no other has received such uncertain answers. This is not mere accident, for the whole protest of the Reformation was in fundamental opposition to the sacramental system of Catholicism. Indeed, all sides of the Protestant criticism may be interpreted as an attack of the Protestant spirit upon the Catholic tendency to a sacramental objectivation and demonization of Christianity.<sup>68</sup>

As a result, even the two sacraments acceptable to the Reformers “have lost their significance [...] only the Word has retained a genuinely sacramental character”.<sup>69</sup> The first part of that statement can be contested, but our purpose is to understand the importance attached by Tillich to sacramentality as a fundamental element in the nature of the Church, not to argue history or theology. He did believe that “a complete disappearance of the sacramental element (not the same thing, be it noted, as the particular sacraments) would lead to the disappearance of the cultus and, finally, to the dissolution of the visible church itself”.<sup>70</sup>

The adjective “particular” should be noted. Tillich did maintain the Protestant position about the primacy of baptism and communion with their Scriptural warranty and thought that “they can still have a long life simply because of the conservative character of all sacral forms”.<sup>71</sup> He was concerned by the fact that the full richness of spiritual meaning inherent in these two sacraments was being eroded and that the potential value of natural, objective, traditional means and occasions for reinforcing that same meaning was being ignored. The spiritual power which they engendered would support action in

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<sup>68</sup> *The Protestant Era.*, p. 94.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*, p. 156.

fulfillment of prophetic demands concerning the Kingdom of God, not lead to a passive piety.

Tillich's explanation of the sacramental importance of baptism is, to me, a rather puzzling one, even if it seems to be intended to stress the immanence of God in a special place and context. He advances an interpretation which he considers "realistic" and which considers water to be the bearer of "sacral power". Following Luther, he rejects any magical power, and also a "symbolic-metaphoric" one linked to the idea of purification or drowning. He does not accept what he called a "ritualistic" justification based simply on a command taken from Scripture without regard to the unique sacral power he describes. The act of baptism would, it seems, follow traditional lines inherent in the stipulation about special places and contexts, and in the Scriptural injunction, with the theology defining some fine lines between sacrament, symbol and metaphor.<sup>72</sup>

In analyzing the meaning of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, Tillich again follows the "realistic" approach, in which the bread and the wine represent "the natural powers that nourish the body and support in the human body the highest possibility of nature. They point to the presence of the divine saving power in the natural basis of all spiritual life as well as in the spiritual life itself".<sup>73</sup> It is also the "sacramental appropriation of the exalted body of Christ", a "spiritual body" which would lack "perceptibility" as such without the "natural element" essential for a sacramental celebration.<sup>74</sup> "A natural reality is elevated to transcendent, divine meaning. Participation in the divine power is a participating also in the divine power in nature".<sup>75</sup> This is not the rational language of some other Protestants. Where does that leave Tillich with regard to "Catholic substance"? Tillich retained a Lutheran emphasis on mystery.

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<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*, p. 95, 96.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, p. 97.

To that he added the perception of divine immanence nature, but in a particular space and context. Any further identification of his explanation would require a debate in comparative theology, either about the sixteenth century, or now.

There is a good deal more to Catholic substance in Tillich's theology than retention of sacraments and a sacramental emphasis in ecclesiology. Since "mysticism" is attributed to him also, and since mysticism comes in many shapes with a great diversity or origins and contexts in world religions, we have to attempt a brief delineation of what this means in his perception of what the Church should be. As in the case of two sacraments, Tillich had his own mystical intuitions and predecessors. The following testimonial to this is provided by his friend (and critic) Nels Ferré.

It was on the same evening that he pronounced his famous dictum that his spiritual father was Schleiermacher, his intellectual father was Schelling, and his grandfather on both sides was Jacob Boehme.<sup>76</sup>

Since these influences came from diverse strands in German Lutheranism and philosophy, Tillich's mystical intuitions, flowering in the better-known contexts of ontological and existentialist theology, cannot be linked only to medieval thought and to mysticism recognized by the Roman Catholic Church. At the same time, he was seen, from a Protestant perspective, by Walter Leibrecht, as "a mystical theologian, in the classic sense".<sup>77</sup>

Tillich's theology was intended to present an unsettling challenge to Protestantism, particularly to the liberal Protestantism of the nineteenth century which he knew well, with its accommodation not only to modern Enlightenment thinking but to the rational and bourgeois culture of the period. The sacramental and mystical emphasis was indeed a challenge. He also challenged pre-Vatican II Roman Catholicism, not only with

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<sup>76</sup> In "Tillich and the Nature of Transcendence", in *Paul Tillich: Retrospect and Future*, Nashville, Tenn. New York: Abingdon Press, 1966, p. 11.

<sup>77</sup> Quoted in Frederic J. Parrella, "Tillich and Contemporary Spirituality" in *Paul Tillich, a New Catholic Assessment*, p. 255.

the Protestant principle about heteronomous absolutism but also with philosophical and theological concepts which were not what Roman Catholics had come to expect from Protestants. In both cases, he was asking why fundamental elements in Christian thought, traditional and universal, could not be accepted as the basis for a regenerated, and ecumenical Church.

The contemporary theologians best placed to assess any claim that Tillich was a mystical theologian in any classical sense, or that he was at least a mystical theologian in his own sense to whom it was worth paying attention, are those in the Roman Catholic tradition who, three decades after Tillich's death, were assessing his work as well as changing perspectives in their own tradition. This group has already been referred to as the authors contributing to *Paul Tillich: a New Catholic Assessment* in 1994.<sup>78</sup>

In view of the points raised in this chapter about familiar and unfamiliar elements in Tillich's theology, so far as traditional Christian thought is concerned, and about new currents in theology in all the Western churches, the comments of Julia A. Lamm seem particularly relevant to what we might expect in the future with respect to "Spiritual Community and Theonomous Culture".

She found that "the relation between what is Catholic and what Protestant in Tillich becomes very complex and fluid [...] no easy classifications". For many reasons, "there are deep affinities with the history of Catholic thought. Yet once again, while he begins with what (from the perspective of Catholicism) is familiar, he moves very quickly into what, if not exactly foreign, is much less familiar". She suggests that the time has come to drop, or adjust, long standing labels of Protestant and Catholic, and some of the phrases repeated frequently in Tillich's theology. "What Tillich calls

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<sup>78</sup> The three authors whose comments are quoted are Julia A.Lamm, in "Catholic Substance Revisited", Frederic J. Parrella, in "Tillich and Contemporary Spirituality", and Kenan B.Osborne, in "Tillich's Understanding of Symbols and Sacramental Theology".

‘Catholic substance’ is really a process of appropriations. If Catholic thought wants to appeal to Tillich’s commendation of its ‘substance’ it must follow the course he himself took. This means that ‘Catholic substance’ must be more broadly construed and therefore that the label itself should be abandoned”. In the interest of understanding both the familiar and the unsettling in Tillich, another label, “Protestant principle” should be considered misleading, and should be abandoned. “The label was intended to capture the sense of the basic religious and theological impulse that arises out of the awareness of God’s absolute transcendence. For that reason, I have argued that a more adequate term for it is ‘prophetic criticism’”.

Julia Lamm concludes that “a dialectical tension between Catholic and Protestant remains, but it is not the controlling polarity.”

The main polarity is that between the “ontological commitment” and “prophetic criticism”; both are necessary for the health and integrity of any religion; each manifests itself in Catholicism as well as Protestantism; under each there are polarities that are operative.<sup>79</sup>

What might Tillich have responded to these comments if they had been made during his lifetime? I believe that he would have agreed and said, with some justice, that his attempt at a mediatory synthesis, not only with respect to Christianity and culture, but also with respect to competing Christian theologies, was beginning to have an effect.

Tillich’s strange combination of ontological and mystical spirituality was found by Frederick J. Parrella to have deep roots.

Ever since the encounter of the gospel message with the Hellenic world, Catholic theology has been grounded in metaphysics. Because he [Tillich] created comprehensive ontology grounded in Plato, Augustine and medieval Franciscan philosophy, he tended to be a stranger both to the Protestant mansion of biblical research and preaching and the Catholic estate of Neo-Scholasticism. This Platonic-Augustinian-Franciscan world view was, of course, deepened and given modern shape and direction through later thinkers, especially Boehme and Schelling.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*; these citations will be found on p. 59, p. 57 and p. 65.

Along with the deep roots, however, Tillich is given credit for a good deal more recent and inventive combination of ideas and systems.

Once viewed by scholars primarily through existentialist categories, Tillich's thought is now accepted much more in the spirit, as Thomas O'Meara says, of the "romantic-idealist systematician" he was. A "mystical ontology" is one of the most important characteristics of Tillich's thought, perhaps rendered all the more significant because it stands in creative tension with his commitment to a prophetic and kairoic interpretation of history.<sup>81</sup>

Parrella perceives, as Tillich did, the loss of a spiritual centre in churches because of a balance tipped towards the values of secular and humanist thought. Theology needs a new, subjective, historical and concrete basis on which spirituality can be related to its natural setting and its origins. He proposes to construct such concepts in a deeper definition of "Catholic substance" available, presumably to Protestants as well as to Roman Catholics. That definition would be ontological in foundation, mystical in direction, sacramental in substance.<sup>82</sup> As in the case of the comments of Julia Lamm, Tillich would have welcomed rethinking in a parallel theological stream which opened up the possibility of a vision of a regenerated, and genuinely ecumenical Church.

Finally, as an example of new Catholic assessments of Tillich in 1994, we have Kenan Osborne's assessment of Tillich's understanding of symbol. Thinking of symbols from an immanent/transcendent perspective, Tillich concluded that "one does not approach the infinite God through a structuring of hierarchical layers; rather one begins to see the infinite God in the dimensions of each and every being".<sup>83</sup>

Tillich's preference for the metaphor of dimension rather than the metaphor of structure seems to be closer to the symbolic and the sacramental theology one finds in Roman Catholic, post-Vatican II theology and liturgy, namely the view that the Church, i.e. the total people of God, is the basic sacrament, and that

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<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*, p. 252.

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*, p. 249.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*, p. 99.

Jesus in his humanity is the primordial sacrament.<sup>84</sup>

Osborne noted, as others have done, that Tillich felt “great kinship” with “the Augustinian school, which Bonaventure and to some degree Scotus represent”.<sup>85</sup>

Linked both to Tillich’s concern with individual existence, its anxieties, and correlation with divine reality in Being-itself, as well as to symbolism and sacramentalism in Catholic substance, we find a deep interest on his part in the emergence of depth psychology and philosophies of existentialism in his period. A study of certain affinities between the writings of Carl Gustav Jung and those of Tillich rounds out one part of the profile of the latter’s theology which must be taken into account. In *Carl Gustav Jung and Paul Tillich; the Psyche as Sacrament*, John P. Dourley points to that linkage.

Jung too shows a warm appreciation of the sacramental principle, especially in the form of ritual reenactment and symbolic expression. He speaks favorably of Catholic sacramentalism, symbolism and ritual as realities that have proceeded from the unconscious, and which retain a strong capacity to lead man back into it if their power is sensitively appreciated and responded to. He sees them as providing “a worthy receptacle for the plethora of figures in the unconscious”. However, like Tillich, Jung is cautious about the way the sacraments are surrounded by the absolute authority of the Church.<sup>86</sup>

Tillich’s “theonomous morality” is set alongside Jung’s “ultimate moral demand”.

Dourley finds the latter’s position “not unlike Tillich’s”. “The ultimate moral determinant engrained in the fabric of the individual is to become oneself”. With Tillich, “this is the work of the Spirit”. With Jung, “the achievement of the self is not only a holy experience but *the* experience of the holy”.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, p. 99,100.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>86</sup> Toronto: Inner City Books, 1981, p. 93.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*, p. 97.

### *A Tentative Model*

This review of some theological bases for a reconciliation of Spiritual Community and Church, some new, some old, some Protestant, some Catholic, has been focussed on the internal affairs of Christian communities. Tillich responded to what he perceived early in the century as dismal reality in many of those communities. His response took the form both of comments on particular aspects of the religious and human situation and of a systematic apologetics on behalf of what he conceived to be essential Christianity. He did not claim for his systematical philosophy and theology the status of a Summa or of a Dogmatics. He posed his particular questions and provided his own particular, and tentative, answers. He did not claim that he had provided unalterable answers. Having defined Being-itself as the doctrine of God in Volume One, he retracted parts of the analysis in Volume Two. Having completed all three Volumes in 1963, he told Mircea Eliade that, if he only had enough time remaining, he would have to rewrite parts of his *Systematic Theology* in the light of new impressions of other world religions, particularly, it seems, in the light of an extensive dialogue with a Master of Zen Buddhism.

The review of the relevance of Tillich's theology to the internal affairs of the Church provides us with only the first part of the evidence required to formulate some idea of a new model of the Church emerging from that theology. The next part has to complete the profile in the light of how Tillich saw the Church and society and the Church and culture. I am referring to society in the secular, functionalist sense proposed in the Introduction and to culture as the societal sphere of meaning and values. It may be useful to extract some points from the evidence so far.

A "tentative model" can only be indicated by means of intentions, principles and conditions emerging in Tillich's theology which would shape the development of a Church (or some churches) to reflect more truly the foundational experience and the

increasing understanding of a revealed New Being among Christian communities.

Following are eight points of this nature which can help to start the profile of a changed, or changing institution.

(1) Tillich's theology was inspired by an ecumenical hope of reunion which would overcome the theological, doctrinal and confessional rigidities which produced fragmentation in the past. That hope of reunion would eventually reconcile the separate paths followed by churches after the fragmentation. His hope was tempered by realism about ecclesiastical institutions and about the first steps taken in his lifetime in the World Council of Churches. His own emphasis on the desirability of a harmonious relationship between Church and culture led him to realize that a close linkage between a church and its cultural environment could impede the achievement of ecumenical goals. Nevertheless, he was urging all churches on different theological fronts to consider the contributions which they could make towards those goals in a continuing transitional period in which pluralism of theologies, rites and systems of governance should not impede inter-church dialogue and cooperation.

(2) The importance of full acceptance of a comprehensive doctrinal statement of belief as a condition of membership would be reduced in favour of (a) simpler statements about the purpose and identity of the Church as bearer of the gospel of Jesus Christ, (b) commitment to learning about the traditions, theologies, social witness and general literature of the Church and (c) commitment to support of the Church's prophetic testimony and work in society.

(3) The role of what might be called the "theological community", of clerical, professional and lay members, would have to be enhanced, but not as a governing elite within the structures of the Church. The role would not be a defensive one of ensuring

compliance with static creeds but one of promoting a continuing assessment of relations between churches and between Church and culture. The primary task would be that of considering change in doctrinal formulations in the light of new understandings, misunderstandings or questions demanding answers in a process identified by Tillich as “correlation”.

(4) The theological community in any branch of the Church, even at the local level, along with the clergy, would have an obligation to implement programs of education for all members (corresponding to the commitment to learning on their part). The subtleties of theological debate about “Being-itself” and monarchical theism, symbols, metaphors, the precise nature of a sacrament and the latest developments in Biblical exegesis, would not be daily fare for reflection by the faithful. They do not seem to constitute the content of many sermons now. Nevertheless productive debate at the inevitably “elitist” level of the theological community could not go too far in any direction without a sustained attempt to explain to the membership what is being debated. If this is not done, and theological reassessments produce change unsettling to the average member, the tensions of adaptation to that change are considerably increased.

(5) Tillich emphasized the importance for the Church universal, if it can be achieved, or for individual churches in formal or informal association with others, to maintain strength and authority independent of the state. In spite of his contrast between Spiritual Community and ecclesiastical organization, he was realistic about changing societal conditions in which the churches would have to make common cause with other non-governmental organizations in what is now frequently called “civil society”. They would not be able to count on much preferred treatment from political agencies. This consideration strengthens the argument for ecumenism, if there is a genuine spiritual consensus.

(6) Throughout Tillich's theology about Spiritual Presence, the operations of the Spirit, the approach to Being-itself, correlation and religious symbolism, there is an emphasis on direct and individual religious experience. He is also critical of hierarchy and authoritarian control of the life of the Church. How are individualism and Spirit-led movements to be kept properly integrated within the community of the Church when strict doctrinal limits also appear to be relaxed in Tillich's prescriptions for regeneration? There are no simple formulas which provide answers. We have to consider the countervailing forces apparent in his theology: the importance of sacramentality, sacraments and liturgy which impose a certain discipline on individual manifestations of the influence of the Spirit; the prophetic demand that the Church fulfill a role of guidance and judgment in the cultural environment; the continuing and essential role of the ordained ministry. Tillich did have faith in the unique and sacramental role of the Church in the world and its ability to maintain the *coincidentia oppositorum* which Nicholas of Cusa preferred to an Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction (another example of a sense of kinship with the former apparently).

(7) Infallibility, attributed to one church leader, or to an assembly, even on matters of faith and morals, seems to be ruled out in Tillich's ecclesiology. No clear indications are given, however, as to the exercise of authority in a new dispensation. His rejection of orthodox creeds requiring total acceptance as a condition of membership logically insists on the legitimacy of change.

(8) Although Tillich seems to grant a certain autonomy to a Spiritual Community in relation to the visible, and organized Church, he also made clear, as we noted, that he was strongly opposed to any schismatic sectarianism, because any sect would be poorer spiritually in losing the rich and diverse currents of religious thought within the larger institution.

At this point we leave the Church and revised theological bases offered by Tillich for its doctrines and faith to consider it from two further perspectives: (1) the Church in its interaction with the world beyond its walls, again in the light of Tillich's judgement and (2) the perception by others of the consequences for the Church of accepting that judgement.

## Chapter Four

### Church, Culture and Liberation

We have noted in Chapter Two Tillich's statements that "the substance of culture is religion and the form of religion is culture" and that "church and society exist beside and against one another" in spite of "new attempts to realize pure unity".<sup>1</sup> The meaning and relevance of this enigmatic analysis for contemporary relations between Church and culture provide the first focus of attention for this present Chapter. As suggested in the Introduction in Chapter One, distinctions ought to be made between culture and society and between the religious element in culture in principle and its institutional manifestation in all dimensions of society.

These well-known points were made in an essay on "Church and Culture" in 1924 and the tension, or dilemma, to which he referred remained central in his thought to the end of his life. Apart from the contrast, typical in his case, between essence and existence, there is, to me at least, a significant difference between the words chosen with regard to essence, "religion and culture", and those chosen for existential, historical reality, that is "church and society". Tillich uses "religion" and "church" more or less interchangeably in this essay and in many other works. The same is true of "society" and "culture".

His statement about religion and culture does not appear original when we consider all the evidence that anthropology and sociology offer with respect to the religious factor in the shaping of the culture of a particular society. We have to understand culture here, as already proposed, to be a superstructure of shared values and a sense of identity which ensured the relatively smooth functioning of that society in relation to economic sustenance and public order. The relationship between religion and culture in that sense does not imply that, logically, there should be "pure unity" when we

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<sup>1</sup> *Interpretation of History*, p. 235 (see Bibliography with regard to original sources).

think of “church and society”. In the periods and places which we now designate as Christendom, the Church was not usually *against* culture. It was the dominant force *in* culture.

We have to think of “society”, however, in terms of conflicts of group and individual interests and aspirations, the processes of politics and governance and the possession of powers of decision. It is not surprising then that the Church, with its hierarchy, institutional interests, and personalities could at that time find itself in intermittent conflict with other important parts of society. It could also exercise power with a cultural basis. A Pope could humble an Emperor. On the other hand, princes, kings and emperors had many means of keeping that powerful cultural institution in check. Henry VIII was proud to claim to be a Defender of the Faith. He then contributed to the fragmentation of the cultural institution which had expressed, and defended, that Faith.

In the contemporary period, the situation with regard to Church, culture and society has obviously changed considerably. There is relatively little inherent conflict at the societal level, if society is defined as suggested above. The Church and its doctrines have been, however, under serious threat on the cultural level both from a relatively friendly rival, secular humanism (with origins in Christian humanism, as Tillich pointed out) and from unfriendly, indeed demonic, quasi-religions, which are other cultural forces but with societal power.

Tillich’s formulas about religion and culture, and about church and society, as noted above, raise important points but can be confusing in their applications. While we have to respect the words which he uses in passages quoted, it seems important to question the meaning intended, in terms of the distinction suggested in the introductory chapter about culture and society.

Let us return to the 1924 essay and consider some other judgements made on the Church and culture theme before trying to relate the outlines of a Church he hoped for, in relation to its viability in its own immediate environment, either in its societal, or its

cultural dimension. Those judgements combine indications of what he thought had to be done within the Church along with enigmatic assumptions about “society”. Both Church and society “must come closer to desperation, the more seriously they take themselves; that is the great revelation of the cleavage of the world”. “The Church is the perpetual guilty conscience of society and society the perpetual guilty conscience of the Church”.<sup>2</sup> That the Christian churches generally by about the end of the nineteenth century began to realize the extent of the gulf which was opening up between their theologies and the thinking of elitist, but increasingly influential, circles is quite clear. The Christians who did perceive this, and who did not blame a sinful world, had reason to feel guilt about loss of contact with the realities of the social situation.

That society felt any widespread sense of guilt about the Church is another matter. The Marxists not only had harsh and influential criticism to make of the functioning of society under the impact of the Industrial Revolution. They offered a competing quasi-religion at the cultural level, a complete system, beginning with scientific materialism, producing a mass of evidence about economic realities and offering great potential societal benefits to the “prisoners of starvation”. Their evocative appeal for social justice did raise among many Christians the religious issue of the ethical demands of their own system.

That Tillich was among the Christians affected by a sense of guilt about society is shown by his commitment to religious socialism, for which he was reprimanded by his own Church. As pointed out in the previous chapter (page 1) he thought that a religious association, or league, might be preferable to churches, petrified in institutionalism. In his *Socialist Decision*<sup>3</sup> he argued for the cultivation of religious roots but made almost no reference to churches at all. Any general theory about Church and society (or culture)

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<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 226, 227.

<sup>3</sup> New York: Harper and Row, 1977 (*Die sozialistische Entscheidung*, 1933, see Bibliography).

being mutually guilt-stricken is not a very helpful description of the 1924 situation. Tillich seems to be stating an ethical/philosophical proposition that they ought to feel guilt, or a personal existentialist tension with respect to divided loyalties.

In this same essay, Tillich presents another formulation with clearer definitions of Church, society and culture. "If Church is that sociological group in which religion is meant, then correspondingly, we should seek a sociological group that is the bearer of culture". He considers the state but then concludes that the bearer is " 'society', not in the formal sense of sociological reality as a whole, but in the sense of a group beside the Church, which feels responsible for culture".<sup>4</sup> There were, indeed, powerful contenders alongside the Church, more ideological than theological, which intended to shape ultimate values and meaning in that cultural dimension. Tillich was making a point which he reiterated frequently, that the bearers of a religious faith either presented a complete system of values and meaning or did not represent a true Church.

In that system, as he understood it, behind all moral demands, particularly those related to social justice, there had to be religious power.

And there is *eros* in *agape*, and *agape* in *eros*, a fact that permitted Christianity to receive into itself the *eros*-created classical culture, both rational and mystical. It is the *agape* element in *eros* that prevents culture from becoming a non-serious, merely transitory entertainment just as *eros* prevents *agape* from becoming a moralistic turning away from the creative potentialities in nature and man toward an exclusive commitment to a God who can only be feared or obeyed, but not loved. For without *eros* toward the ultimate good there is no love toward God.

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Love, in the sense of *agape*, contains justice in itself as its unconditional element and as its weapon against its own sentimentalization. It is regrettable that Christianity has often concealed its unwillingness to do justice, or to fight for it, by setting off love against justice, and performing works of love in the sense of "charity" instead of battling for the removal of social injustice.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Interpretation of History*, p. 219,220.

<sup>5</sup> *Morality and Beyond*, New York: Harper and Row, 1963, p. 40, 39.

To these assertions, late in life, he added others relevant to our theme of Church, Culture and Liberation and to the various distinctions between Church and Spiritual Community in one sphere, and various sectors in the secular sphere of culture (page 59).

The relation of Protestantism to the secular realm is the most positive, due to the Protestant principle that the sacred sphere is not nearer to the Ultimate than the secular sphere. It denies that either of them has a greater claim to grace than the other; both are infinitely distant from and infinitely near to the Divine. This stems from the fact that Protestantism was largely a lay movement, like the Renaissance [...] a synthesis between the Enlightenment and Protestantism was possible, while in Catholic countries, even today, Christianity and the Enlightenment are still struggling with each other. The danger of the Protestant idea, of course, is that the acceptance of secularism can lead to a slow elimination of the religious dimension altogether, even within the Protestant churches [...] it is obvious that Protestantism is more open to, and, consequently, a more easy prey of the quasi-religions. The Roman Church has denied to all three types of quasi-religion—the nationalist, the socialist, and the liberal-humanist—any *religious* significance.<sup>6</sup>

Tillich added, with relation to the “dialectical and even ambiguous” relation of Protestantism to the quasi-religions, that “Protestantism can receive and transform the religious elements of the quasi-religions”.<sup>7</sup> If “religious elements” and “religious significance” can be attributed to movements, organizations and philosophies within a “secular realm”, all of which, in terms of their basic purposes, would disclaim a religious identity, then that “secular realm”, and “culture”, which appear to be identical, cannot be considered “profane”. “Holy”, the quality or experience of being sought after by a Spiritual Community, and available within a theonomous culture, can correctly be opposed to “profane” within normal human experience and preoccupations. Culture is not, therefore, to be understood as the profane world, in a dualistic scheme of cosmic realities, with which the Church, as the bearer of religion, has to find some means of dealing. It is that dimension of human awareness and shared experience within which

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<sup>6</sup> *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions*, New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1963, p. 47-48.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 49.

ultimately religious issues must be faced. The Christian Church, with its faith in the message of a particular Messiah, takes its place, as a institution within culture, along with others. That way of relating Church and culture seems to fit Tillich's 1924 definitions respecting religion, culture, meaning and form.

*Theology of Culture, Theology of the Church*

The Church does not intend, therefore, in Tillich's system, to admonish the world on the grounds that, outside its walls, there is no salvation. It intends, rather, to receive and transform elements from other systems of thought. The essence of the Church, as reported in the preceding chapter, is a more or less indefinable Spiritual Community which has a close spiritual relationship with a theonomous sector of culture outside the Church. That sector is also hard to define since it is said to be latent, invisible and possibly only potential. All of these characteristics of Tillich's thinking about the Church are bound to produce a question in the mind of a critical reader as to whether he was writing theology, or a philosophy about religion which would encompass the whole cultural spectrum of society.

James Luther Adams, a friend, associate and editor of works by and about Tillich, in introducing Tillich's *What is Religion*, comments on what seems to be the type of synthesis which Tillich had in mind.

Since all syntheses are provisional, the absolute synthesis, the universal synthesis, is not something "given". It is a symbol of the plumb line by which all are measured and found wanting; it is the plumb line that symbolizes authentic fulfillment of meaning. Or we may say that it is an eschatological symbol. Yet Tillich believes that it was impressively approached in the high Middle Ages. In principle, if it were generally respected in a society, that society would be moving in the direction of a theonomous cultural synthesis.<sup>8</sup>

Adams then concludes that "in this fashion Tillich's philosophy of religion aims to fulfill

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<sup>8</sup> p. 22.

its task of achieving a synthesis between religion and philosophy of religion”. That synthesis would be the “point at which both of them share the directedness toward the Unconditional, the point at which both of them are theonomous”.<sup>9</sup>

Since there was no doubt in the high Middle Ages about the role and identity of the Church and about the creeds which had to be accepted, it is difficult to understand how a comparable synthesis could be anticipated, even if Tillich reserved a place in his provisional synthesis for a historical community articulating its own doctrine of revelation. Adams, in his comments, points out that Tillich, as theologian, later gave philosophy a somewhat lower religious status “by assimilating it to his method of correlation wherein it asks questions for theology to answer”.<sup>10</sup>

Are there two, or more, theological systems apparent in Tillich’s work, one focussed on the Church and its basic faith, one on the societal/cultural environment and its secular components, and another on individual existence? The title of one of his major works, *Theology of Culture*, and his emphasis on the free operations of the Spiritual Presence outside of the Church in a theonomous culture, almost suggests that there are three interwoven systems. In the Foreword to that book, however, Tillich states that its purpose is “to show the religious dimension in many special spheres of man’s cultural activity”. This dimension “is never absent in cultural creations even if they show no relation to religion in the narrower sense of the word”. No “ecclesiastical control of cultural creativity” is meant.<sup>11</sup> One can conclude also that no “theology” either, in the strict sense of the term, is meant either, or, at least, none separate from the systematic theological exposition completed in 1963.

The most important point in the Church and Culture relationship, one directly relevant to changing models of the Church, is that its leaders, theologians and members

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> p. v.

have to accept the possible truth of judgements coming from outside their ranks on matters which Tillich considered to be of ultimate concern. As we have seen, he claimed that while the nature of God, of Being-itself, remained the same, the interpretations of human relations with that unconditional reality did change. There had to be an interaction between the interpretations coming from Church and from culture, not only with respect to matters of doctrine and faith but, most obviously, with respect to new and difficult issues in human affairs. Neither of the two interlocuteurs could assume superiority of judgment; neither would be the passive recipient of advocacy from the other.

The religious institution then had to be separate from the state but not from that dimension of values and meaning, identified as culture, in which it was as much a participant as its religious, quasi-religious or secular rivals and critics. The inevitable interaction of Church and Culture on that basis would not be an easy one, if the churches both obeyed prophetic demands for realization of the Kingdom of God in this world, while admitting the possibility of error or the need for revised thinking about their own doctrines.

A helpful historical perspective on this situation is provided by Marc Michel in his analysis, *La théologie aux prises avec la culture. De Schleiermacher à Tillich*.<sup>12</sup>

Lorsque Schleiermacher et Tillich constatèrent l'éloignement de leurs Églises par rapport à leurs contemporains, ils se tournèrent vers la culture, à laquelle ils participaient activement, pour y déceler les formes nouvelles propres à rendre audible le message du christianisme. Justin n'avait pas fait autre chose.<sup>13</sup>

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Schleiermacher et Tillich appartiennent tous les deux à la *théologie de la médiation*. Pour eux, la médiation ne représente pas une option pour la théologie, mais elle en définit au contraire la nature. Celle-ci consiste à *interpréter le christianisme en fonction de la culture*.<sup>14</sup>

The "prophetic" nature of Tillich's thought, said Michel, was both philosophical

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<sup>12</sup> Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1982.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 308.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 296.

and theological and led him to be open to new forms of thinking or action. He did not accept, however, the need to make a choice between simplistic alternatives posed by some Christians of static adherence to an imagined security in the past or by others attracted by the inspiration of the moment. His understanding of history and his sensitivity with regard to the contemporary culture of which the Church was a part ensured the balance necessary for theology as mediation.<sup>15</sup>

In the abundant critical commentaries on all aspects of Tillich's theology and philosophy which appeared during his lifetime and afterwards, the theme of "religion and culture" has been a major one, both for those who welcomed the emphasis which he gave to that theme, and for those who thought that religion, and specifically Christianity, would decline into secularism if culture assumed a guiding role within the Church.

In view of the question raised about possibly competing, or incompatible, theological systems within Tillich's extensive work, it is very helpful to note the approach to religion and culture, in terms of the evolution of Tillich's thinking, presented at a symposium on the occasion of the centenary of his birth in 1986. In a report entitled "Religion et culture dans l'évolution de Paul Tillich", Jean Richard notes the central position of that theme in Tillich's theology, an emphasis which Tillich thought might help to liberate theology "from the isolation into which it was pushed partly by outside criticism, partly by its own self-restriction".<sup>16</sup> This explanation supports the point made by Marc Michel about theology *as* mediation. Richard points out that Tillich's cultural emphasis was not intended to reinforce secularisation in religion so much as to insist on the religious aspects in culture, even by using theological language and speaking about

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p. 290, 295, 306.

<sup>16</sup> in *Religion et Culture*, Québec, Paris: Université Laval, Éditions du Cerf, p. 53, 54; the quotation from Tillich is from *The Christian Century*, periodical, Dec.7, 1960 p. 1437.

a theology of culture.<sup>17</sup> Richard traces the development of that analysis of culture until he comes to Tillich's *Systematic Theology*. At that point, "dès le début de l'introduction, nous constatons un changement important: c'est la corrélation message-situation qui remplace le rapport religion-culture. Le message doit s'entendre ici au sens bien précis du message chrétien : l'évangile, le kerygme."<sup>18</sup>

Il y a d'abord le fait qu'on est passé d'une théologie de la culture à une théologie de l'Église. Tel est bien en effet le type de théologie qu'annonce la Théologie systématique dès le début: "La théologie en tant que fonction de l'Église chrétienne, doit servir les besoins de l'Église". Or la mission première de l'Église est l'annonce du message chrétien.<sup>19</sup>

The importance of culture from a religious perspective is not thereby reduced but redefined, in Richard's interpretation. The existential questions, and the self-interpretations of human beings are presented to theology, as the interpretation of ultimate reality. Richard's interpretation is similar to that of Adams, (page 103) except that the latter referred to Tillich's philosophy being eventually integrated into a theological assertion about correlation.

The following succinct summary of Tillich's thought about Church and culture suggested by Langdon Gilkey fits very well with the assessments made by others. In referring to the need within culture of political criticism with a religious basis, it points to the next theme which we have to consider, that of Church and liberation.

The culture desperately needs, therefore, on the one hand, a *political* criticism of its injustice, as Tillich embodied in his early career; on the other hand, culture needs a *rational* and a *religious* criticism of its ultimate pre-suppositions if it is to be whole and healthy. [...] Correspondingly, religion desperately needs (and equally so) the rational and moral critique of culture so that it is neither esoteric, trivial and irrelevant nor heteronomous. Culture and church depend on each other; they equally need each other and the critique that each gives to the other.

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid*, p. 55.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*, p. 64.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid*.

Gilkey completes this assessment, and tribute to Tillich, by referring to the “unity” of culture and church, which “manifests the fulfillment of each in theonomy, or, in eschatological terms, in the Kingdom.”<sup>20</sup>

### *Church and Liberation*

Gilkey’s reference to “unity” raises the same question as the one noted at the beginning of the chapter (page98) about Tillich’s distress that Church and society were not only beside but “against “ one another. They had not found “pure unity”, in spite of the over-riding principle governing relations between religion and culture. If Church and society had scarcely achieved unity, even when the particular religion represented by the Church was more or less unchallenged, so far as the cultural dimension of values and meaning was concerned, then it is difficult to imagine now the unity of culture and Church to which Gilkey refers.

Surely the most important point to be taken from all Tillich’s writings about theology and culture was that he was warning the Church that it could not expect to regain any monopoly of the definition of meaning and values. The creative ideas of those influential in that cultural dimension, but quite outside the Church, whether those ideas could be classified as secular or religious, had been challenging, and would continue to challenge, the institution bearing the Christian message. The theoretical achievement of unity between culture and church would seem to eliminate the need for any Church, a point emphasized by Gilkey’s reference to an eschatological Kingdom. By the end of his life, Tillich also anticipated a growing influence of other world religions in cultures in which Christianity had been dominant.

So far as models of the Church are concerned, we have to think not only of the balance sought by Tillich with regard to change and continuity in the institution itself but

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<sup>20</sup> *Gilkey on Tillich*, p. 66.

also, to a very important extent, with regard to its interactions with what he summed up as “culture”. How are we to understand “interactions”? In the last volume of his *Systematic Theology*, Tillich wrote about the relating functions of the churches.

The churches, in paradoxical unity with their Spiritual essences, are sociological realities, showing all the ambiguities of the social self-creation of life. Therefore they have continuous encounters with other sociological groups, acting upon them and receiving from them.<sup>21</sup>

Tillich defined three ways in which these encounters take place: “the way of silent interpenetration, the way of critical judgement and the way of political establishment”.<sup>22</sup>

Let us leave the second and third ways until we come to matters at issue between the Church and the world to which the nature of the interaction is relevant. The first way of silent interpenetration does set the scene for Tillich’s perception of encounter.

Moreover the influence is mutual; the churches receive the silent influx of the developing and changing cultural forms of the society, consciously or unconsciously. The most obvious of these influences is felt in the continuous transformation of the ways of understanding and expressing experiences in a living culture. The churches silently give Spiritual substance to the society in which they live, and the churches silently receive Spiritual forms from the same society. This mutual exchange, silently exercised at every moment, is the first relating function of the church.<sup>23</sup>

No examples are given of the “cultural forms” and the “Spiritual forms” which the churches are said to be receiving in this mysterious “silent interpenetration”. We are dependent on a more prosaic line in this passage in attempting to grasp the nature of the process he is writing about: “ways of understanding and expressing experiences in a living culture”. The living culture must be the one in which he lived himself, with a very immediate awareness of the Germanic and European culture of the preceding century into which he was born. Philosophy, history, psychology and the arts in the nineteenth

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<sup>21</sup> Vol. III, p. 212.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p. 213.

century were indeed finding their own ways of comprehension and expression. They were creating a culture separate from, and increasingly hostile to the inherited one within the churches. The churches could not make themselves immune to the effects of such change, nor could they surrender any continuing claim to contribute Spiritual substance to the culture to which they belonged. As always with Tillich we are not sure whether he is describing abstract processes and relationships, or prescribing them. In a mediatory synthesis he is both introducing new ways of understanding an inherited faith within the Church and defending its claims to spiritual substance, as Schleiermacher had done, to the “cultured despisers” outside.

The continuous encounters to which Tillich referred were, and are, multiple. I have chosen one word, “liberation”, in order to introduce reflections on some of the ways in which the Church received, modified, rejected, reciprocated or projected understandings and expressions in the cultural sphere of meaning and values. In the intellectual and political history of the twentieth century, the theme of liberation will very likely be a leading one, regardless of how one judges the motives, methods or consequences of those promoting what they considered to be liberating change. The subject areas are considerably varied; the devolution of imperial power; the demand for recognition of group identity; the constitutional formulation of human rights, nationally and internationally; gender equality; the ethical aspects of sexuality; considerations of equity as against economic power; transformation of fixed moral codes towards new ethical and contextual systems; revision of orthodox creeds in religious systems; secularisation, from the standpoint of those who could no longer accept institutional power in those religious systems; equality for the victims of racism.

In all of these areas, questions of values and ultimate meaning, characteristic of culture as defined in this analysis, have had to be resolved. It is difficult to draw a line between such issues and processes and the technical, technological, economic, utilitarian or rational manipulative processes which Tillich categorized as secular and autonomous.

In societies open to change at an earlier period the churches could not avoid the issues. On a global scale now the same processes continue for all religions.

It is in this global context that churches have had to engage in what Tillich called, very prosaically, “continuous encounters with other sociological groups”, whether by way of silent flow, critical judgment or political establishment. What have the churches absorbed from, or contributed to, particular processes of liberation? In what sense is spiritual substance part of the contribution?

If we look for answers in Tillich’s writings in Germany then secular Marxism provided the challenge and the encounter. Tillich’s response was to urge German socialists to deepen their roots in culture there by finding support for their political program in the Christian substance of the prophetic demand for justice. He could speak only for the religious socialist movement within his Church at that time.

If we pose the same questions with regard to later writings about the Church, interactions with culture and liberation on the very broad front outlined above we will have a quite different example of a secular impact and a religious response. Tillich’s existentialist orientation and his interest in secular psychology formed the basis for an ontology focussed on the most immediate personal experience of the anxieties of fate, absurdity and guilt. It was this emphasis in his theology which attracted the greatest attention in the United States. As in Germany he could not speak for a church. He was, however, applying traditional Christian ideas about the life of the spirit to what he and others saw as an Age of Anxiety and to the typical manifestations of the age to be found in literature and the arts. Beyond morality, in any traditional or contemporary sense, was spiritual substance at a profound level, the Christian concept of *agape*.

Can we think of this second example of the interactions of Church and culture, following Tillich’s precepts, as liberation? We can, if we are careful to take into account all the other contemporary definitions, applications and connotations of “liberation”.

For the liberation theologians within the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America Tillich's later concern with the anxieties of individuals and his response to those anxieties scarcely fitted into their model. Their concern has been focussed primarily on overcoming flagrant social injustice. Their demands for action by the Church were met by the Vatican with a concession, followed by an admonition. It was conceded that social injustice had to be a matter of concern to the Church. The admonition was that social and political liberation could proceed only as part of the wider and traditional effort of the Church to help individuals achieve what was called "integral" liberation. That was indeed traditional since it meant liberation from the burden of sin. For the liberation leaders the admonition was evasive since they considered social evil to be structural and systemic and the primary target for action by the Church.

From that perspective are we to classify Tillich's concern with individual existence to be traditional and moralistic? He said that he had not dropped concern with social ethics and a prophetic demand for justice in his theological system but that the spiritual orientations implied in fullness of being were also essential. Although the content of his concept of fullness of being, including personal ethics and response to the anxiety of guilt, cannot be called traditional the concept seems to have as much claim to be liberative as one called integral.

The second type of interaction between Church and culture suggested by Tillich called for the exercise of "critical judgement". I assume that he expected both sides in an encounter to accept this need. This takes us into issues more immediately tangible than those of "Spiritual substance" raised above. They are scarcely part of a very "silent" influx. Gender equality is a liberation issue in twentieth century terms. Definition and implementation, throughout Western society particularly, have presented difficult questions of choice in that society, Implementation proceeds, however, supported by judgements as to justice debated in the cultural sphere. The churches in that same society could not avoid the issue, whether they welcomed it or not, as an issue initiated and

developed primarily within the secular realm.

The churches which decided to accept equal access to all ministries and offices within their institution have done so for two reasons. They could not find any compelling reason in doctrine why they should not do so. They concluded that the change would be beneficial in terms of the purpose and operations of the institution. The churches which have refused to accept such change have, in effect, been backed into a corner of defending an argument that God had indicated an eternal preference for the cultural norms of Jewish society at a particular point in history. This is not, admittedly, the official explanation given!. The churches choosing change on this issue, accepted a “critical” judgement made in society generally, in keeping with what Tillich correctly referred to as “continuous transformation of the ways of understanding and expressing experiences in a living culture”.

How did Tillich stand on the specific issue of gender equality? The issue was reaching a peak of attention in churches only towards the end of his life. It is difficult to find indications of attention on his part comparable, for example, to the issues raised in religious socialism in the 1920’s. His language did not fit any newly developing criteria of inclusiveness. Perhaps the answer most relevant to this theme of interactions and liberation comes from a former Christian and radical feminist, Mary Daly, who did not seem likely to be interested in any theological revisionism from a male source.

Michel Dion, in his *Libération féministe et salut chrétien: Mary Daly et Paul Tillich*, does point out that Daly’s acknowledgement of influence from Tillich is highly selective.<sup>24</sup> It was his ontological theology, his concept of New Being, and his dismantling of a heavenly hierarchy, very patriarchal in appearance and theological significance, which she found useful as she developed her own system. The pivotal place given in Tillich’s system to New Being embodied in a male Saviour, and his concepts of

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<sup>24</sup> Montréal: Éditions Bellarmin, 1995.

universal alienation were not acceptable to her. The chief source of alienation felt by women, she argues, is the continuing patriarchy, or attempts at patriarchy, by men.

Dion points out that support by Tillich for equal status for women is found in his *Socialist Decision* and in other works, but as part of social justice and liberation sought for all, in the same way that patriarchy is seen as part of absolutist, and heteronomous, religious hierarchy. In general, “Tillich semble avoir été l’objet d’une certaine concientisation féministe”.<sup>25</sup> Another analysis of Tillich’s theology, from a feminist perspective, and with reference to Mary Daly, concludes that “Tillich’s symbol of the New Being as saving, reconciling power can express the exciting, new energy which comes out of the feminist experience of overcoming self-estrangement and alienation. Daly broadens Tillich’s term from its focus on Jesus as the Christ to describe women as the bearers of New Being as they struggle for justice in the midst of patriarchy.”<sup>26</sup>

In the case of gender equality, therefore, some churches, whether or not there was any direct influence by Tillich, acted in accordance with his advocacy of treating “living culture” outside the Church with respect, not with suspicion, and revising traditional practices. They did not surrender to the ways of the world, as conservatives invariably allege when changes occur. A critical judgement was made by these churches in deciding on that change; gender equality, as a principle, did not require acceptance, for example, of the full range of radical feminist thought. Has there been any reciprocity by churches with respect to what they took from secular culture? Although Tillich did not speak for any church, his concepts of Being-itself, New Being, and the “courage to be”, emerging from a revised theology within the Christian tradition, has had some of the effects indicated in the comments above.

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>26</sup> Mary Ann Stenger, “Paul Tillich and the Feminist Critique of Roman Catholic Theology”, in *Paul Tillich, a New Catholic Assessment*, p.184.

We have now reviewed some examples of the relating functions between Church and culture, as Tillich outlined them in Volume Three of his *Systematic Theology*. They involve interactions, reciprocity, mutual influence, in spheres clearly spiritual or societal (gender equality) but not as ambitiously political and near-ideological as the sphere which we now have to consider. That is what Tillich and a small group of idealists in the Weimar Republic, within or close to the Lutheran Church, chose to call “religious socialism”. Tillich’s involvement led to a warning from his own Church authorities and then to the cancellation of his appointment at the University of Frankfurt by the Nazis and his emigration. He also attacked the Nazis, as the nature of their ideology and its threat both to the Republic and to the churches became clear.

In the second part of his career, as we have noted, he was primarily concerned with the theological response to the existentialist situation of individual lives in the age of anxiety. He maintained that he had not abandoned his principles with regard to theological responses to the most pressing questions of social justice, even if he avoided the word “socialism” in the American context. Given his frequent reminders about a prophetic demand for action in support of righteousness in this world, there is no reason to doubt this assurance. In Germany, he had not taken any active role in the Socialist Party. His appeal in the *Socialist Decision*, directed primarily to that Party and the German working class, was to strengthen their case for justice by incorporating the religious resources available in Christian belief and tradition. He backed up his plea in this and in other works by lengthy historical analysis of the myths of origin and of historical developments which had led to the situation in which the Weimar Republic, and Europe, found themselves after the end of the First World War. It was a situation in which Tillich, along with the Socialists, rejected the bourgeois liberalism, religious and political, of the preceding century.

With these reminders as preamble, we can look further at what he said about “continuous encounters with other sociological groups”, this time with reference to

“critical judgement” and “political establishment” in the riskier areas of ideology, politics and relations with the state. While “silent penetration of a society by the Spiritual Presence can be called ‘priestly’, the open attack on this society in the name of the Spiritual Presence can be called ‘prophetic’. Its success may be rather limited but the fact that the society is put under judgement and must react positively or negatively to the judgement is in itself a success”.<sup>27</sup> Tillich then proposed a heroic role of encouraging “prophetic criticism of the negativities in their society up to the point of martyrdom”; since he can hardly have been thinking of the United States at that point, he was, with good reason, thinking of what had happened in Germany. It was not necessary, however, to think in terms of this ultimate challenge. There could be, even in the dangerous field of politics, “a kind of reverse prophetism”. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, criticism of the churches from outside had produced “an almost unbridgeable gap between the churches and large groups of society, in particular the labor movements”. Nevertheless, under the impact of this attack, they had revised “their interpretations of justice and humanity”.<sup>28</sup>

This advice to the churches about the prophetic demand, and about the need in this field, as in others, to listen to and to reflect upon what was happening in society generally, comes under the heading of the second type of Church and culture interaction, that of critical judgement. So did the issue of gender equality, apparently. The third kind of interaction is that of “political establishment”.

The advice to the churches under this last heading, and the indication of what Tillich thought the ideal Church should be, are surprising. At least, we might say that it indicates the gap between a model of “dismal reality” at an early period and how he saw the “priestly and prophetic function” in his concluding assessment of the role of a

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<sup>27</sup> *Systematic Theology, Vol. III*, p.213.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p.189.

religious institution. In Christology, Christ has “a royal function”, and every church has a “political function, from the local up to the international level”. Church leaders must “influence the leaders of the other social groups in such a way that the right of the church to exercise its priestly and prophetic function is acknowledged by them”. “Social groups” appears to mean all of culture and society, beyond the immediate reach of the Church. “The churches should [...] fight for the preservation and strengthening of their priestly influence (for example in the realm of education)”.<sup>29</sup>

Tillich recognizes the need for some assurances about limitations to this firm demand for a “royal office”. There will be no use of “military force, intoxicating propaganda, [...] diplomatic ruses, the arousing of religious fanaticism”. More importantly, considering our examination of the “Church and culture” principle of mutual criticism and continuing interaction, Tillich ends this summary of the three types of interaction by stating that “Even the churches are subject to the law of political compromise. They must be ready not only to direct but also to be directed”.<sup>30</sup>

This combination of assertions and cautious assurances to the rest of society about the role of the Church is remarkably traditional in relation to the criteria guiding most leaders of mainstream churches. They still seem to leave open important questions about the full meaning of the prophetic demand in relation to a “political function”. Can the Church be confident in choosing, or appearing to choose, an essentially political, and probably ideological, option, if it decides “to direct” society about its ethical obligations. The liberation theologians in Latin America faced this difficult decision after the first phase of their assault on capitalism was leading to second thoughts. Juan Luis Segundo tackled the subject in his *Faith and Ideologies*, as we shall see. In Tillich’s case, we have

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 215.

to return to his religious socialism to ask about the relationship between religion and the very political word, “socialism”, which he avoided using in the United States.

In his *Socialist Decision*, published in German in 1933, the year in which he had to leave, Tillich came to a very positive conclusion with regard to “the future of socialism”.

The socialist principle is able to solve the antinomies of socialism. It is superior not only to the bourgeois principle, but to the romantic principle as well. It alone has the power to create a future for Western civilization. The collapse of the bourgeois principle is becoming increasingly obvious with every crisis of capitalism. All forms of belief in harmony are dying out.<sup>31</sup>

This tribute to socialism obviously has historical, philosophical, even theological, reservations built into it. They are indicated by repetition of the word “principle”. In Tillich’s interpretation of history, the romantic myths of origins had led to romantic conservatism in political parties, even to the emergence of romantic revolutionaries, the National Socialists. The bourgeois principle supported by nineteenth century liberal Protestantism was rejected by Tillich because of its naive illusion of social harmony. That illusion was contrary to the realities of existence, particularly proletarian existence. That type of liberalism had emerged from the Enlightenment as an alternative to romantic myths but now had to be superseded. Tillich was not, however, engaged only in philosophizing about history. A particular political party, and a sector of German society, were seen as the potential saviours of Western civilization.

Tillich’s recognition of “reverse prophetism” in his advice to the churches in 1963 about encounters with culture, has its origins in his appeal to socialists in 1933.

Socialism should not abandon the churches, but engage them--not in order to use them as tools in a purely political struggle, as National Socialism has done--but in order to lead them back to their own principle. In this way, it can free the powers of origin that are preserved in them from ecclesiastical torpidity and thus let these powers flow into the socialist society.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> p. 160.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, p. 176.

Tillich does suggest that there is a distinction between engagement in a “purely political struggle” and commitment to religious socialism, but neither in this book, nor in other writings, does he offer much wisdom about the means, for the churches, of making the distinction. His commitment was, basically, membership in an academic-type study group. By that membership, and public advocacy, in principle, of socialism, he was urging upon the churches the need for action in support of a prophetic demand.

The churches, however, as support for the Nazis increased dramatically, were primarily concerned with ensuring not just their prophetic, but their “priestly” existence, with respect to the considerations of “political establishment” which Tillich recognized in his final advice about interactions between Church and culture. Ironically, and tragically, the appeal of the word “socialism” when combined with nationalist sentiments and Germanic myths of origin had an impact on German culture which made it very difficult for the churches to undertake a prophetic response.

Other comments in the *Socialist Decision* throw light both on the dilemmas of a “progressive” political movement, and of the Church.

It is not the most enlightened, the so-called “most progressive” consciousness that influences history. It is the consciousness whose energies flow from the fullness and depth of being, which brings it to light. Such energies are often lacking among socialist intellectuals. As a result, its very high degree of enlightenment and its amazingly progressive consciousness are neither symbolically powerful nor historically creative.<sup>33</sup>

Tillich would not, presumably, have disagreed if someone had interjected at this point that such gifts were, by his account, not really noticeable either in the realms of what he had just called “ecclesiastical torpidity”. He would have pointed to the need for evocative symbols, found only at the religious level of “depth of being”, even perhaps, in his perception at that time, in socialist, and secular, “faith”.

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p. 137.

*The future symbolic language can be developed only through a combination of religious and secular symbolism.* Therefore, the socialist movement's task of seeking out new symbols must be pursued in close association with the churches' equally urgent task of translating the religiously symbolic language of the past into the secular consciousness of the present.<sup>34</sup> (Tillich's italics)

This approach to symbolism scarcely fits, in my view, with what he asserted on other occasions about the life and death of symbols not being produced by acts of intention or will or in order to serve a rational consideration of interest. He did not believe that secularism could produce any real symbols. In 1933, of course, he hoped for a revelation, a manifestation of *kairos*, in which religion and socialism would constitute a dynamic force in human affairs. Demonic religious elements and powerful secular ones were combined very effectively, and symbolically, however, in the swastika.

In this situation, churches in Germany and elsewhere did not, with reference to Tillich's three types of encounter between Church and culture, have the strength of "political establishment". They often lacked the perception required for accurate "critical judgement", in order to carry out a prophetic and "political function". In the previous century, they had failed to understand the appeal of Marxism to masses of working people, as well as to intellectuals, even if their "political establishment" seemed solid.

After Tillich's death, and particularly in the last two decades, there has been a revival of interest in the political aspects of Tillich's theology, to be distinguished from the existentialist, psychological and individualist ones. The assessments by some authors of those political aspects adds to our understanding of how Tillich's hopes for a religious/secular force in a highly political situation appeared at a later stage in the century.

In 1985, Dennis McCann, along with others, contributed an article to the book, *The Thought of Paul Tillich*, and raised the question about Tillich's religious socialism, "Creative Synthesis or Personal Statement?". He compared the theologies of Reinhold

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<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, p. 147.

Niebuhr, Juan Luis Segundo and Paul Tillich. His position appears to be close to that of Niebuhr, identified, at least by his followers as “Christian realism” and based on biblical foundations, the social gospel, and political realities in an American context. McCann found the *Socialist Decision* brilliant in its exposition of Tillich’s personal philosophy and poignant, considering its purpose when it was written. Nevertheless, it was more “oracular”, “intuitive”, “a religious horizon for the counter-culture of German expressionism”, and a “religious vision beyond religion”, than a successful synthesis of politics and religion.<sup>35</sup>

Jean Richard, contributing with others to *Paul Tillich; New Catholic Assessment* in 1994 compared “The Socialist Tillich and Liberation Theology” and found “a striking similarity between the struggle of religious socialism in the first decades of this century and the struggle of liberation theology today”<sup>36</sup> Tillich met the same objections from his Church.

But at that time in Germany, Marxist socialism had not yet fallen into disrepute; rather it was blossoming into a new democratic regime, the Weimar Republic. Tillich openly behaved as a socialist, and he answered directly the charges of the Church by showing the intimate relationship between Christianity and socialism.<sup>37</sup>

Richard pointed to Tillich’s recommendation to the Lutheran Church that, if it is to be seen as a Church of the people, it should take a positive attitude toward socialism.

Representatives of the Church who stand on socialist ground should not be prevented from entering the socialist movement. In the same way, no one should be turned aside from leadership in the Church because of his socialist ideas. Of course, this will cause conflict within the Church, but contrary to the sect, the Church can withstand such tension. Thus the Christian socialist movement will have a positive effect upon the Church.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> James Luther Adams et al. eds., San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985, p. 97,98

<sup>36</sup> p. 148.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, p. 153.

Ronald H. Stone, reviewing the record of Tillich's writing and speaking in the United States between 1933 and the outbreak of war in 1939, concluded that its essential message was a cautious one.

The church can solve the social problem only in itself. It cannot resolve the class warfare or mass disintegration of the present; however, it can witness to the Kingdom of God and achieve community in the present. Again and again the churches will need to search for the right balance of "*religious reservation from history and religious obligation toward history*".<sup>39</sup> (Stone's italics)

The important points made to Americans were that "religious socialism was an option, but not for the whole church". This meant "Christian reservation about any political party". Religious socialism should remain a movement "while the church remained unidentified with any political party".<sup>40</sup>

A more revealing account, not only of caution, but of disillusionment on Tillich's part concerning the political and religious hopes of the German period is provided by John R. Stumme in 1978. "In a discussion with Lowe, Horkheimer and Pollock on January 28, 1945, Tillich spoke of his new disposition. Disappointed and exhausted, he had become more relativistic and sceptical in his attitude toward time."

I was never a primitive utopianist and today I am no primitive absolutist. The catastrophe of the kairós hope has caused me to experience the absolute more than the political. I then believed it possible to bring about a fundamental change in Christian theology with the categories of religious socialism; today my hope is limited to giving to the Americans a developed theology, which they have never had. In 1920 it was different; then I wanted to inaugurate a new period of Christianity. Neither in thinking nor in acting can I be the old. In both I have reverted from the conversion situation of Paul into a somewhat sceptical situation of Saul.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Paul Tillich's Radical Social Thought*, Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980, p. 95.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, p. 95,96.

<sup>41</sup> *Socialism in Theological Perspective: a Study of Paul Tillich*, Missoula, Montana, Scholars Press, 1978. The report on the 1945 discussion was unpublished and is in the Tillich Archive in Goettingen, Germany. Adolph Lowe, Friedrich Pollock and Max Horkheimer were members of the Frankfurt School associated with Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt. They had been exiled also to the United States. Tillich was teaching at that University in 1933. In Stumme's book, p. 252.

There is a certain sadness and irony in the fact that in this discussion in 1945 Tillich had to admit the failure of his hopes for mediation between the Church and socialism to other distinguished political and intellectual refugees whose commitment in the Frankfurt School was to developing a critical theory of Marxism. Institutional and political contingencies obviously presented considerable impediments to the theorists on both sides.

Stumme concluded that “Tillich’s political period ended in 1945, having extended from one war to the end of another. From 1945 until his death twenty years later, social and political questions played a subordinate role in his life and thought”.<sup>42</sup> Stumme also reported on a speech made by Tillich in 1955 to the New York Christian Action Group. This group had some Christian Socialist antecedents and Tillich retained sympathetic links with them even if he was no longer inclined to claim a socialist identity himself. From the emphasis on pragmatic and incremental change for the better in society, rather than a revolutionary transformation Stumme concluded that Tillich could be identified as a “liberal democrat” in the American context.<sup>43</sup> To Stumme’s conclusion I would add the comment that once he had shed what he had admitted to another American audience was “European provincialism” he came closer to Reinhold Niebuhr’s “Christian realism” than to European socialism. He had also observed that the American Christians were more socially active than European ones.

#### *Additions to the Model*

This review of Tillich’s approach to “Church, Culture and Liberation” obviously suggests additions and amendments to the eight points suggested about a model for the Church in the previous chapter. Most of these will await examination of the liberation,

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<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, p. 254.

theological and ecclesiological themes in the next generation of theologians, represented by Juan Luis Segundo. Some points could, however, be made here.

The elaborate intellectual architecture of the *Systematic Theology*, and its conclusions about the three ways of encounter and interaction with culture, do provide the essential outlines of the Church which Tillich hoped to see emerge. He did not abandon the cultural, philosophical and existentialist basis for his revision of theology in the light of his alienation from orthodox doctrine concerning God. He did integrate very carefully his Christology and his ecclesiology in order to protect the Church, which he had come to realize was the only secure basis for a continuing attempt to achieve partial implementation of the Kingdom of God in the world beyond. Holding these two aspects of his religious thought together in the life of the Church, and in the appeal to secular culture, would require a sustained and difficult process of education, both internal and external. It also implied an elitist, even traditional, concept of the role of church leaders, clergy and theologians. From that comment, we might now turn to the thinking of a Latin American theologian who seems to have reached much the same conclusion after the experience of a relatively unsuccessful attempt at revolutionary transformation in another region.

## Chapter Five

### *Concientización*:<sup>1</sup>Latin American Awareness

#### The Liberation Movement and Juan Luis Segundo

We have traced one cycle in the life and thought of Paul Tillich which began with hopes and expectations about a reconciliation of religion and politics in an immediate and creative way and ended with skepticism about the immediacy of the reconciliation. Another cycle began in the United States in which other dimensions of religion, culture and individual lives were explored. Two points about this process might be noted before we move into a quite different theological and cultural context. The first is that the secularization of modernity described in Chapter One reduces religious conviction in some minds but stimulates new religious convictions and a critique of secularization itself in others. The second point is that while theological reflection can eventually shape the nature and functioning of an institution in a discernible way, the cultural and societal context for that reflection will shape its questions if not its ultimate conclusions.

The liberation movement originating with theologians in Latin America in the mid-century inaugurated another cycle relevant to our interest in models of the Church. These theologians called for the application of what they understood to be the inherited, but often misunderstood wisdom of Scripture, to the effort to liberate the mass of people

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<sup>1</sup> This word in Spanish became widely associated in Latin America with the religious and political movement initiated by the liberation theologians. It originated with the work of Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, in the late 1950's and early 1960's (in Portuguese *concientizacao*). The meaning is "roughly equivalent to 'consciousness-raising'" which was an important part of programs of adult literacy in which rural populations in particular were taught by means of words and ideas arising out of their particular social, political and "life-situation" (Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1987, pp. 35-37). The basic ideas were carried into Bible study in the base communities.

from injustice and alienation in their own immediate political context. The excitement in this new religious awareness is evident in the following testimony of Leonardo Boff.

We are living in privileged times. There is an upsurge of life in the Church that is revitalizing the entire body from head to toe [...]. The grassroots are asking for a new structure, a new ecclesial division of labor and of religious power. For this, a new vision of the Church is necessary.<sup>2</sup>

That he was advocating a new structure was clear. The Church at large “structured as a network of institutional services” would converge with the Church “as a network of base communities”.<sup>3</sup> These communities would help the whole Church “in the process of clericalization”. They would restore to the faithful “the rights of which they have been deprived in the linear structure”.<sup>4</sup> In this new vision of the Church the laity would have a much more important role, women could become priests, celibacy would not be required of priests, and liturgy, even the mass, could be adapted to local situations in which no priest was available. The present institutional structure of the Church (the Roman Catholic Church) could be preserved as a hierarchy of services and symbol of unity but would require considerable transformation. In view of its past and current close association with the wealthy classes the Church appeared politically to Boff to be like a giant multinational corporation. In company with other liberation theologians he believed that it would have to become primarily a Church of the Poor, rejecting capitalism and its structures of exploitation and violence. It would be like the Church communities of the first centuries.

Leonardo Boff’s model of the Church and its theological basis were described by the liberal Protestant theologian, Harvey Cox, who expressed sympathy with the

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<sup>2</sup> *Church Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church*, London: S.C.M. Press, 1985, p. ix (Portuguese, *Igreja: Carisma e Poder*, 1981)

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, p. 121.

<sup>4</sup> *Ecclesio-Genesis: the Base Communities Reinvent the Church*, London: Collins, 1987, p. 32 (Portuguese: *Eclesiogénesis: As comunidades eclesiais reinventam a Igreja*, 1977).

objectives of the liberation movement, in terms of evangelical radicalism. There was no question of seeking a modern model. Even the progressive liberalism of Vatican II, which was preferable to older models, did not meet the requirements of the liberation movement in Boff's view.<sup>5</sup>

Boff's vision of the true Church corresponded very closely to that of his associates in the liberation movement who wrote about one aspect or another of its new and dramatic insights. Gustavo Gutierrez, whose *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, Salvation* gained the most immediate attention as a summons to liberation, emphasized the prophetic obligation of the Church to demand justice for the oppressed.<sup>6</sup> The political summons was dramatic and the ideological choice clear. He called for "profound transformation of the private property system" in a "social revolution" to bring about "a socialist society".<sup>7</sup> The Church "must place itself squarely within the process of revolution" and put its "social weight" behind such transformation.<sup>8</sup> He carried this radicalism to the point of proposing "social appropriation of the means of production [...] the conduct of politics and finally of liberty; so preparing the way for a new social consciousness".<sup>9</sup> The German theologian Jürgen Moltmann, who was generally sympathetic to the liberation movement, expressed apprehension about the menacing implications of these references to politics and liberty and about authoritarian tendencies in liberation theology.<sup>10</sup> Gutierrez identified theologians as "organic intellectuals" who

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<sup>5</sup> *The Silencing of Leonardo Boff: The Vatican and the Future of World Christianity*, Oak Park, Ill.: Meyer -Stone, 1988, p.24.

<sup>6</sup> Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1973 (Spanish edition, *Teología de la Liberación*, 1971)

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, p. 27.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, p. 138, 139; he pursues this theme in p. 266 to 271.

<sup>9</sup> "Liberation Movements and Theology" in Edward Schillebeeckx, Bas von Iersel, eds., *Jesus Christ and Human Freedom*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1974, p. 141.

<sup>10</sup> "An Open Letter to José Miguez-Bonino" in Gerald Anderson and Thomas Stransky, eds., *Mission Trends No. 4*, New York, Paulist Press, 1979, p. 57 to 63.

would only assist the poor to be the real initiators, agents and beneficiaries as “forgers of a radically different society”.<sup>11</sup>

The references by Gutierrez to “social appropriations” do not convey a balanced picture of where he actually stood politically. He insisted that liberation was not, in principle, the same as revolution and took his distance from another contemporary movement guided by a “theology of revolution”. With respect to means and ends, he seemed to be somewhere between revolution and reform, depending on the circumstances anticipated. By 1988 he had changed his political stance and said that “socialism is not an essential of liberation theology; one can support liberation theology, or do liberation theology, without espousing socialism”. He was prepared to be considered a “radical anti-capitalist rather than a Marxist”.<sup>12</sup>

These brief examples of positions taken by liberation theologians indicate the extent to which we could indeed trace the dramatic implications for a new model of the Church in any one of the theologies. Political and other convictions differed among the theologians and even more in the wider circles which constituted the movement.<sup>13</sup> As we have noted, convictions changed over time.

Why choose to examine the theology of Juan Luis Segundo and not that of Leonardo Boff, for example, who certainly wrote about the Church? Segundo is generally considered to be one of the liberation theologians, even if he disagreed with Gutierrez, Boff, Sobrino and others on the fundamental question of the role of the poor. He could not be considered representative, therefore, of important elements in the liberation movement, at least in its early phase. It would be difficult now to choose representative

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<sup>11</sup> *The Power of the Poor in History, Selected Writings*, London: S.C.M. Press, 1983 p. 37 (Spanish; *La Fuerza Historico de los Pobres*, 1979).

<sup>12</sup> In Arthur F. McGovern, *Liberation Theology and its Critics: Toward an Assessment* Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989, p. 148.

<sup>13</sup> In a seminar paper I traced four distinct positions within the liberation movement regarding violence to achieve political ends.

positions for a movement with regard to the Church or other issues.

I have chosen Segundo because I believe that his theology deals more profoundly with interlocking questions of religion, ideology, secularisation, political means and ends and the Church than do the works of others who have sought the same political objectives for essentially religious reasons. At the same time, his writings should be understood within the political and cultural context of movements intended to define a new and strong role for the Church with regard to the implementation of its own concept of the Kingdom of God. Segundo was as capable of authoritarian positions and the use of ideologies as were the others, as we shall see when we come to his definition of a *Crux Theologica*, for himself and for others.

Before turning specifically to Segundo, we might note some aspects of that political context and positions more or less common among liberation theologians at the time of the Episcopal Conference in Medellin in Colombia in 1968, when their advocacy achieved an important degree of recognition in Conference resolutions and wider public attention.<sup>14</sup> Overshadowing most of the local situations of extreme poverty, social backwardness and political oppression in Latin America was the fact that, in their view, capitalism in their own region had inherently unjust and violent characteristics and that internationally the economic power of the industrially developed nations committed to that system made it impossible for countries with weaker economies to break out of a situation of dependency and achieve their own progress. The liberation theologians took their economic theory from various forms of contemporary Marxist and other analyses available to them in universities and regional institutions, such as the United Nations

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<sup>14</sup> General accounts of the political context, the theological positions and the movement at that time and later are provided in studies such as those listed in the Bibliography, for example: Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology: the Essential Facts about the Revolutionary Movement in Latin America and Beyond*, New York: Pantheon, 1987; Deane William Fenn, *Third World Liberation Theologies, an Introductory Survey*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1986.

Economic Commission for Latin America, while insisting that they were not accepting philosophical materialism along with the economic theory. The basic justification, theologically, for the attack on capitalism had been derived from Biblical sources and from the teaching of churches, recent or long-standing, about compassion for the poor, human rights, the spiritual dangers of excessive wealth and the priority of community over individual interests and rights.

The liberation theologians had also mounted an attack on what they considered to be long-standing “pathologies of power” (a phrase of Leonardo Boff) within the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America and globally. By this they meant dogmatic conservatism and identification with governing establishments and with the wealthiest circles in society. Openings to change at the Vatican II Council were welcome but, as we have noted, the liberation agenda demanded more change. The revolution in Cuba and rebellious movements and spirits in many places in the 1960’s influenced ideas and aspirations in Latin America. Many of the theologians had studied in Europe and North America and were familiar with developing concepts of politically oriented theology. In the realm of ideas related to the political opportunities and contingencies of the day these were, in the words of Leonardo Boff already quoted, “privileged times” with an “upsurge of life in the Church”.

### *Capitalism versus Socialism: Crux Theologica*

Juan Luis Segundo was born in Montevideo in 1925, educated in Argentina and in Belgium at the University of Louvain, entered the priesthood and the Jesuit order and received a doctorate from the University of Paris in 1963 for theses on Nicholas Berdyaev and the philosophy of religion. He was engaged for a long time in research concerned with the sociology of religion and with courses in theology for adult lay people. Some of his published works have emerged from reflection and discussion in which lay people were active participants. His *Liberation of Theology* is an expanded

version of a course given at Harvard University in 1974. Social transformation and liberation have been fundamental themes in his published works.<sup>15</sup>

We may now turn to one of his works which places him firmly within the political context of the liberation movement so far as political objectives are concerned. It also begins to trace the role of the Church as he has seen it.

Segundo's essay "Capitalism versus Socialism: *Crux Theologica*" was published (in English) in 1979.<sup>16</sup> It was one of several essays which reflected on how the liberation movement stood, more or less, in the mid-1970's. Segundo insisted that the essential issue posed in his essay, and in the whole liberation movement, was a theological one. It was being presented in academic discourse as "political and kerygmatic rather than theological in the strict sense" but this perspective was based on a misunderstanding of theology.<sup>17</sup> The Church had slowly forgotten that "the ecclesiastical realm was supposed to maintain a functional relationship with human history". It was a "human societal life liberated as much as possible from all alienation" which constituted "the *absolute* value, whereas all religious institutions, dogmas, sacraments and ecclesiastical authorities have only a *relative* (i.e. functional) value".<sup>18</sup> In working with human sciences in order to understand societal realities, liberation theologians are "proposing to theologize in the strict sense".<sup>19</sup>

If people decide that the gospel message has nothing to say about such a critical human issue as the choice between capitalism and socialism, then it is obvious that the gospel message can only have an absolute value, a non-functional value. In other words, its value is nil.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The Bibliography lists original and translated titles.

<sup>16</sup> In Rosino Gibellini ed., *Frontiers of Theology in Latin America*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979, pp. 240 to 259.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. 240

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p. 243

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 244

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 245

The liberation theologians, whatever their differences about interpretation of “liberation”, or about how to shape the Church of the future, were agreed that “human beings, both as individuals and as political beings, are already building up the kingdom of God here and now in history”.<sup>21</sup> Segundo rejected first of all a cautious ecclesiastical view that the Church should not interfere in politics. He then criticized European political theologians for what he found to be their relativism and skepticism about moving towards the Kingdom of God by direct political action.

### *Hermeneutical Circle*

The basic challenge to the Church by the Latin American theologians was that of accepting the need for immediate and direct political action. Church authorities responded in one or the other of two ways. First of all, the Church, as the custodian of revelation about a different order of realities, should not be involved in the profane political realities of the world. The second type of reply was that applying dogma to judgement of those profane realities was in principle permissible but that the liberation theologians had not understood dogma and its Scriptural basis correctly and were not free to change the foundational creeds.

The second challenge from the liberation theologians was to contest this latter assertion with their own hermeneutical approach. Gutierrez, in presenting his theology of liberation, spoke of the need for “theology in movement”. Segundo, shortly afterwards, asserted the need for liberation *of* theology.<sup>22</sup> A few years after that, he carried the revisionist process a few steps forward by calling for the liberation of *dogma* and questioning orthodox concepts of teaching authority. He was reinforcing the argument made earlier, and noted above, about the ecclesiastical establishment having a functional

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 247

<sup>22</sup> *Liberation of Theology*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1976 (original Spanish, 1975)

and secondary role, not an absolutist one, with reference to bringing about the kingdom of God.<sup>23</sup>

In this more recent exposition of the case for hermeneutical freedom of revision, Segundo argues along lines very close to those of Tillich.

As it enters the modern era, however, the church is encumbered with too many things that did not exist in the beginning, but which it now believes it cannot do without. As long as it could exercise its religious power over the European world, it did not strive for a dialogue that would have led it back to the richness of history. It remained stuck on the defensive and making claims to perennial validity which prevented it from having enriching experiences.<sup>24</sup>

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“Divine revelation” is not a deposit of true information, but a *true pedagogy*. The divine revelation of God and the human being does not consist in amassing correct information in their regard. That revelation is a “process”, and in that process we do not learn “things”. We learn to learn just as in any pedagogy, in which children are “guided” (the etymology of “ped-*agogue*”) to learn to seek after truth through trial and error.<sup>25</sup>

Segundo thought that the truth of these criticisms was borne out dramatically in the history of European colonization of the Americas. Western culture and the Christian religion were not only imposed with violence but demonstrated an “inability to dialogue with the real life of the human world encountered on this side of the Atlantic”.<sup>26</sup>

Segundo admitted the risks of change with respect to interpretation of revelation, to the teachings of the Church, and to the application of those teachings to political options in society. There is a wager, because “we have only one life and cannot ‘test out’ in advance what we are going to choose”.<sup>27</sup> Even more risk-taking, in view of what he advocated as the correct option in the *Crux Theologica*, is Segundo’s reflection that

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<sup>23</sup> *The Liberation of Dogma: Faith, Revelation and Dogmatic Teaching Authority*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1992 (original Spanish, 1989)

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 245

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p. 254

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p. 242

“when you start a revolution, you do not yet know what historical price it will demand of you, or what will remain of your project even after you have paid the price”.<sup>28</sup> As a balance to risk-taking and possible errors in judging situations, Segundo affirmed his confidence that, by processes of learning to learn, “each generation is thrust toward a more perfect maturity, and toward a new, deeper, and richer truth”.<sup>29</sup> This evolutionist argument obviously has its dangers for the exponent of the Christian faith, which Segundo seems to have realized when he made a balancing statement. “Without Israel, or the church, in the world we know, and in Christian tradition, there is no revelation of God”.<sup>30</sup> What Segundo advocated as a very broad direction of policy, based on his reading of Scripture and understanding of Christian tradition, might not seem very radical in other churches but it was what he found it necessary to urge upon his own ecclesiastical authorities.

Segundo’s hermeneutical challenge to orthodoxy in the *Liberation of Dogma* was a continuation of a methodological and liberative theme developed first in the *Liberation of Theology*. In this latter work, the development of a “hermeneutical circle” occupied a central place. The scope, and purpose, of this dissertation do not permit, or require, a detailed account of how he worked out the full implications of his system, not only with reference to Latin America and the Church, but also with reference to contemporary liberative philosophies and sciences beyond that sphere. Some essential points about the circle must be mentioned, however, because they throw light on the question of changing models of the Church. The initial one might seem surprising, coming from a theologian: “the one and only thing that can maintain the liberative character of any theology is not its content, but its methodology”.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p. 246

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 247

<sup>31</sup> *Liberation of Theology*, p. 40

Here is a preliminary definition of the hermeneutical circle; it is the continuing change in our interpretation of the Bible which is dictated by the continuing changes in our present day reality, both individual and societal [...]. And the circular nature of this interpretation stems from the fact that each new reality obliges us to interpret the word of God afresh, to change reality accordingly, and then to go back and reinterpret the word of God again, and so on.<sup>32</sup>

The circle begins with the experience of reality, explained by Segundo as commitment to action, as praxis, even with the risks of decision about involvement in a matter of fundamental importance. Commitment is the first step, theology the second. He repeated the comment of Gutierrez that “theology is the second step in the methodology of Jesus, and the first step in the methodology of the Pharisees”.<sup>33</sup> Reflection on that experience will likely lead to an ideological suspicion, that “anything and everything involving ideas, including theology, is intimately bound up with the existing social situation in at least an unconscious way”.<sup>34</sup> That suspicion leads to the second step, in which theological and ideological superstructures, the required or inherited frameworks of meaning to explain the human situation, are no longer being taken for granted. They must be examined in terms of their credibility in the light of the initial experience of reality. From that examination there develops a new experience of theological reality which raises exegetical suspicion about the interpretation of Scripture in the third step. Considered with new questions and from fresh perspectives, a new hermeneutic with regard to the Bible in the fourth step can then be applied to a fuller understanding of that personal involvement which started the circle.<sup>35</sup>

In view of the Marxist influence in economic dependency theory, and of references such as one noted above about the human sciences being allies for theology, one might assume, on first reading about the hermeneutical circle, that it represented

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<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, p. 65

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p. 78

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, p. 65

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, p. 92 ff.

further erosion by liberal secularism of the credibility and societal relevance of both Scriptures and theology. Segundo's hermeneutics have, however, to be read in conjunction with a scathing attack on "what is called positivist or behaviourist sociology. In a word, it is United States sociology" becoming prevalent in Latin America.<sup>36</sup> Segundo lamented the "growing refusal of contemporary sociology to tackle problems regarding values".<sup>37</sup> There is not much doubt that the liberation theologians, in their openness to doctrinal change, had not embraced secularism, but had found dramatic confirmation in Scripture for their inclination towards revolutionary praxis.

The appeal to, and use of, Scripture by Roman Catholic liberation theologians in Latin America presented the Vatican with two types of problems in attempting to restrain political activism by priests and academic theologians under the discipline of the Church. In the first place, Rome had to concede that turning to Scriptures for guidance on social issues was commendable, in principle, and that preference for the poor had some impressive Scriptural backing. In the second place, however, individual exegesis beyond the control of bishops and other Church authorities, particularly in base communities, posed dangers for the unity of the faith.

The exegesis undertaken by liberation theologians, along with the political imperative of the *Crux Theologica* and the hermeneutical circle in general, was indeed unsettling with respect to ecclesiastical control and orthodox theology. In a study of "liberating exegesis", the authors Christopher Rowland and Mark Corner point to new approaches, and to some of the implications of that exegesis. "We are aware that as contextual theology becomes ever more popular old certainties about boundaries of acceptable exegesis begin to crumble". "The exegete must work not only in the

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<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p. 48 to 57; Segundo lists seven "shifts" or "retreats" of sociology from general theory to "fragmented specialities" and quantitative analyses in sociology.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, p. 49

traditional disciplines, such as history and archaeology, which primarily study the past, but also those, like social theory, which primarily study the present”.<sup>38</sup>

Segundo recognizes the need to ask questions about the interpreter of the text as well. It is important, for instance, to understand the social and economic world within which the Bible is read, as well as that within which it was written, if we are to understand how it is to be interpreted.<sup>39</sup>

The authors of the study point also to the links between liberating ( or liberation) exegesis and the secular sciences. “Liberation exegesis adopts what Habermas has called an “ideological suspicion” in order to consider the connections between knowledge and human interests in the interpreter—a process which academic theology has been happy to apply to the biblical writers themselves for more than a century”.<sup>40</sup> Rowland and Corner come to a conclusion to which the liberation theologians have been, no doubt, happy to subscribe, and to use as a defence for any trouble they are causing by re-thinking the meaning of the Bible for the contemporary world.

What we have ourselves made we can ourselves unmake, if we have the courage to make an analysis that will inevitably force us to endure conflict with those holding power in our society. Even in the present age, we possess the opportunity to encounter the age to come. Our claim is that the theology of liberation expresses that opportunity in terms which come from the depths of Christian history, and from tradition woven deeply into the fabric of its sacred literature.<sup>41</sup>

Unlike Paul Tillich, whose philosophical and religious system was sometimes rated by critics as impressive but not necessarily Christian, the liberation theologians have very sound Christian credentials. As we have noted, Harvey Cox described Leonardo Boff with a phrase which could be applied to the whole movement: “evangelical radical”. In the same passage Cox said that Boff was not a modernist.

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<sup>38</sup> *Liberating Exegesis: the Challenge of Liberation Theology to Biblical Studies*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989. P. 5, 75

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, p. 75

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, p.76

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, p.198

. In my view, Segundo is partly an evangelical radical, but also a modernist, in his own Latin American context, but not necessarily a “liberal” in a European or North American sense. Those qualities, added to an inherited and corporate Jesuit sense of the realities of power, ecclesiastical or secular, must make him a particular thorn in the flesh for Church authorities.

The processes of concientization in Latin America, described in this chapter with reference particularly to the response to the *crux theologica* and to new hermeneutics, lead to the third question about change, this one the Ecclesial question, about the Church itself. New theological and hermeneutical trends do not necessarily alter the shape of the institution, but when these are part of a deliberate shock which the liberation movement has intended to administer to that institution, then basic questions arise about the nature of the sacred assembly, its role in society and its ability to act on the ambitious liberation agenda. The issue is more “ecclesial” than “ecclesiastical”, since it concerns the whole assembly, more than a system of governance.

### *Church of, or for, the Poor?*

Questions about a “model” of the Church are neither narrowly theological nor narrowly sociological. They concern a religious institution within the cultural sphere of any society, as these terms have been used so far in this analysis. An Islamic community, as a minority in a country with different religious groups and with a secular government could be described in the same way. In a society self-proclaimed as an Islamic state, the Islamic structures in a religious sense are one dimension of the state itself.

Although Tillich’s original ecclesial identity was Lutheran, his radical theological revisionism was aimed at all churches. When he spoke of an evangelical and catholic Church as being an ideal type, he was attributing traditional attributes to whatever institution might emerge from various modern ecumenical initiatives. As we have seen,

he pointed to the shortcomings of all churches in relation to his theological profile of Christianity.

We are trying to extract from the writings of Juan Luis Segundo an understanding of the Church, as a universal Christian institution, following his theological precepts. What Segundo and other liberation theologians are talking about most emphatically is what they want to see happen, at least initially, within the Roman Catholic Church.. Even more specifically, we might say, within that Church in Latin America. This is not a contradiction of what has already been pointed out about an ecumenical spirit among the theologians in question. They are glad to be influenced by, and to influence, what theologians and churches elsewhere are thinking and doing. The concepts of Church and liberation, however, are focussed closer to home and to familiar situations. These comments do not ignore either the fact that Protestants have become involved in the liberation movement and that their Roman Catholic associates have welcomed allies in all matters having to do with “capitalism versus socialism”. Among the Protestants who have expanded their presence in Latin America considerably in recent years, the range of attitudes towards the political aspects of the liberation movement is similar to that in the Roman Catholic Church. The religious and political orientations of the home bases for those churches in North America and Europe have been relevant to positions taken in Latin America.<sup>42</sup>

What would be the new model of the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America, pointing to an eventual universal and ecumenical one, so far as Segundo is concerned? We have already noted that he parted company with other liberation theologians with respect to the initiating and guiding role of the poor. The four models within the Roman

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<sup>42</sup> Some Protestant points of view are found in the following books: J. Andrew Kirk, *Liberation Theology: an Evangelical View from the Third World*, London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1979; Emilio A. Nuñez, *Liberation Theology*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1985.

Catholic Church for which Boff provided profiles were reviewed in the Introduction. They were the following: (1) a pious inward looking community of faith; (2) a conservative authoritarian institution concerned with order in society; (3) the liberal and progressive People of God assembled at Vatican II pursuing incremental reform in society and (4) the liberation Church determined to achieve social justice, by revolutionary means if necessary.

Segundo could claim membership in both (3) and (4). Since he believes firmly in the role of a vanguard, to be examined in the next Chapter, he shares some attitudes about institutional authority with the conservatives in (2) if not their political intentions.

From those perspectives what is it that Segundo wants to see changed in his own Church and why does he reject the Church of the Poor? An outline of the main elements in his critique in both senses will complete this chapter and prepare for the theme of the next chapter, that of the Church as it should be.

The main elements in the social critique, some already decribed, could be summed up as follows. The Church had failed to take a decisive stand on matters of social justice. It had been too closely associated with governing establishments and wealthier circles. Even with progress at Vatican II, it had failed to live up to its obligations to advance the Kingdom of God in history and to understand such an obligation as a theological issue. The Church had entered modernity with irrelevant doctrinal encumbrances, a static conception of its role as a guardian of a fixed deposit of information and an unwillingness to accept the need for continuing hermeneutical review of Scripture and doctrine.

To this formidable list of deficiencies, we must add Segundo's reflections in 1969 on the Church after Vatican II and after the Episcopal Conference of 1968 at Medellin.

In Latin America, the Church must bring these changes into effect. It is a Church poor in quality, very clerical although it lacks clergy, without substantial lay support, more insecure than creative, lacking evangelization in depth to begin with.<sup>43</sup>

The Church must change its methods and structures urgently and radically in order to respond to an unusual pace of change in society, and a social conscience more and more critical. Having made this demand, Segundo, not only a critic but also a member of the Church, conceded that it would be illogical to expect an institution whose whole sustaining structures had been static for centuries to adapt itself to change in a very short time. What he wanted to do was to shake it out of a certain paralysis.<sup>44</sup> The two conferences which had started a process of change coincided with the external impact of a different revelation, that of the acute and potentially inhuman impact of international capitalism.<sup>45</sup> Again the churchman and Jesuit, Segundo rejected the idea that there might be an invisible, clandestine, church out there in society, ready to help rescue the Church. The reality was the familiar one, that of a Church which was both a structured institution with a hierarchy and a charismatic and spiritual community. It would require all the maturity of the Christians concerned to manage the tension between these two poles.<sup>46</sup>

Segundo was fighting an intellectual and spiritual war on various fronts. He welcomed the purposes and accomplishments of Vatican II in the 1960's (although the Latin American bishops there had realized their distance from the Europeans and the need to undertake their own *aggiornamento*) . When the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, under Cardinal Ratzinger in the 1980's, took it upon itself to admonish and instruct the liberation theologians as to how they were to understand liberation, Segundo

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<sup>43</sup> *Iglesia latinoamericana: Protesta o profecia?* Avellaneda, Argentina: Ediciones Busqueda , 1969, p. 12 (my translation)

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, p. 13

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, p. 10

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, p. 14

took strong exception to the voice from Rome. He wrote a book in response to Ratzinger with a warning to the whole church about the implications of the instructions from Rome. Other liberation theologians were inclined to treat Ratzinger's views as an obvious caricature of their movement and not to pay too much attention to them. Segundo, who had his own criticism of some important aspects of the liberation views of his friends, as we shall see, defended the purposes of the whole movement, and the right of its participants to propose their theological assessments to the Church. Two points only from Segundo's lengthy response need be noted here. On the first point, he enlisted the support of an eminent European theologian, Karl Rahner.

Two weeks before his death, Karl Rahner wrote to the Cardinal Archbishop of Lima and proclaimed, "I am convinced of the orthodoxy of the theological work of Gustavo Gutierrez. The Theology of Liberation that he represents is entirely orthodox". [...] Today there are diverse schools and it has always been thus [...] It would be deplorable if this legitimate pluralism were to be restricted by administrative means.<sup>47</sup>

The second point did not refer directly to the text of the *Instruction*, but to views expressed by Ratzinger at that time which indicated to Segundo the context in which that document was drafted. The latter's response is interesting in relation to the factor of "Latin Americanism" in theology already mentioned. Ratzinger had expressed concern that liberation theology in Latin America was being influenced, regrettably, by a Protestant, Rudolf Bultmann. Segundo said that while the Latin American theologians respected the status of "one of the most influential theologians of this century", there was nothing further from their context than the "Bultmannian methodology and agenda", a rather bleak example of what was considered modernism in Europe.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued its *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation"*, Vatican City, in 1984. Segundo's reply was *Theology and the Church: a Response to Cardinal Ratzinger and a Warning to the Whole Church*, Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985, p. 17

<sup>48</sup> *ibid*, p. 3

Segundo also objected to the assumption that the theological viewpoints of members of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith constituted the true faith while the propositions of the Latin Americans were mere theology, subject to error.<sup>49</sup> I assume that this comment was considered impudent in Rome.

We now have to turn to another part of the ecclesial problem, another campaign waged by Segundo to keep the Church, and its dissident reform and liberation-minded minority, on track towards effective change. In his criticism of the vision of a new model of the Church emerging from the works of Gutierrez, Boff, Sobrino and others, it is difficult to know to what extent personal and professional rivalries, inner-Church or inner-University politics, or perhaps the tensions within a moderately revolutionary movement anxious to get on with the fight, play a part. The resources available here for this analysis do not provide the whole picture. The essential points made by Segundo, about how liberation from social injustice and ecclesial lethargy could actually take place are quite consistent with his whole theological argument. They are indeed relevant to this study of models of the church.

In a lecture in 1983, at the University of Toronto, Segundo said that the real impetus towards significant change in the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America was under way before the 1960's. It was centred primarily in Universities among students and teachers, with increasing influence within the Church. From the sociological perspective, it was a middle-class movement. This "first theology of liberation was committed to a long term and far reaching goal".<sup>50</sup> It did acquire some firm ecclesiastical support in the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes*. What became known, more widely, as liberation theology in the 1970's, particularly in 1971, (Segundo is referring to the publication of the *Theology of Liberation* by Gustavo Gutierrez) was, in a way, a baptism of an infant

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<sup>49</sup> *ibid*, p. 16

<sup>50</sup> "Two Theologies of Liberation" in Alfred Hennelly, *Liberation Theology: a Documentary History*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990, p. 358

born ten years before. Unfortunately, as this second theology of liberation got under way, it took a significantly different direction from the first one and made two mistakes. Its proponents thought that liberation theology could be developed out of practice and that the main criterion and goal was orthopraxis, rather than new interpretations of orthodoxy. In Segundo's hermeneutical cycle, active commitment was certainly the first step, along with "suspicion", but only the beginning of an elaborate and continuing process of review "of doctrine, exegesis and social reality". From this limitation regarding orthopraxis, Gutierrez and others developed a concept of liberation from below in society. They believed in the historical power and discipleship of the poor. They trusted a capability for ecclesial regeneration on the part of the poor. At this point, Segundo parted company emphatically with this second wave of "liberation".

Segundo was very much part of the earlier movement. His work in the Centro Pedro Fabro in Montevideo was typical of the approach to reform in that movement. It was certainly oriented towards working *for* the poor but was not based on any illusions that reform of the doctrine and structures of the Church would be achieved primarily *by* the poor. At the heart of this divergence was the problem of "popular religion" in Latin America, more or less within the Roman Catholic Church. Segundo said that it was largely superstitious, conservative and fatalist with regard to social change. This situation was the result of the failure of the Church ever to achieve evangelization in depth or communication with the native religions in the colonial period. Those envisaging a "Church of the poor" certainly did not represent popular religion in that sense. They thought, however, that the tenacity with which people still adhered to it in parts of Latin American society pointed to a "power of the poor" to shape religion in new ways towards a just society. Segundo thought that this was a form of populism, of which Latin America had had enough.

These opposing points of view were represented as "theologies" and certainly had roots in the theological convictions of all parties. Judgements of reality had more to do,

however, with the interactions between Church and culture and with ecclesiastical strategy than with the Biblical roots justifying a rebellion against injustice. Segundo, from the perspective of work with lay people and students in that latter field, was concerned with that particular segment of his cultural environment, “popular religion”, which was a serious impediment to reform of the Church. His comments in the 1983 lecture on “two theologies” define that perspective very clearly.

Now, the middle class are usually considered by sociologists as the most mobile and creative part of society, inclined either to provoke rightist upheavals when they feel their interests or social order threatened, or to be involved in restructuring and liberating society when they feel guilty. Thus it was not the oppressed people but the middle class, beginning with the students, who received the first features of this liberation theology as a joyful conversion and a new commitment [...] a new theological vision of faith was thus assumed by a wide range of middle class Christians as a liberating force [...]<sup>51</sup>

Segundo also believed that the Church of the Poor concept, in spite of its aspirations to promote a peaceful revolution towards a more just society, could be taken over more easily by the official Church than his own critical theological approach directed to the middle class.

The church need no longer radically question its theology, but only preach liberation, offer its services and power to the people, and lead them by the hand to the political options recognized by a paternalistic church as being more representative of the popular interests.<sup>52</sup>

When he parted company with Gutierrez, Boff, Sobrino and Dussel for the reasons described above, Segundo still referred to a common cause. In 1985, in his response to Cardinal Ratzinger, he referred to differences within the liberation movement but defended it against Rome. Nevertheless, in 1983, his judgement of the errors of the “other” liberation theology was a very sharp one. “As a result, twenty years later,

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<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, p. 358

<sup>52</sup> *Signs of the Times; Theological Reflections*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993, p.95. This quotation is from an 1983 essay entitled “A Note on Irony and Sorrow: What has Happened to Liberation Theology in Its More than Twenty Years”.

Latin American liberation theology is more a repetitive apology for itself than a constructive theological discourse".<sup>53</sup>.

By the end of the 1980's, as noted earlier, Gutierrez and others were beginning to withdraw from too close an ideological association with socialism, although not from "liberation" and social justice. Other routes and emphases could be found, they said. Political trends in Latin America, for the most part, supported Segundo's thesis about the middle class, which turned against military regimes but not in favour of socialism.

Segundo has continued to develop his ideas about reform of the Church and in the following chapter his goal in that respect has to be examined. One obvious point to be considered is how he reconciled his support for socialism in the *crux theologica* with his emphasis on the middle class. The ideas involved can be attractive to some middle class intellectuals, but not to the Latin American middle classes generally.

What can be taken from this review of the roles of Segundo and of the liberation movement in a certain awakening in Latin America (obviously there were comparable developments in other parts of the world in the 1960's and 1970's) is confirmation of Tillich's assessment of the close interactions of Church and culture, in a very different context from his one. The motive force behind a demand for new meaning, with religious depth, with regard to political struggles, came from groups within the Church. A volatile political culture was not only the object at which this demand was directed, but also the source of warnings about how political realities could be changed. In some critical situations in Latin America, the Church, responding to new ideas about its obligations to society, did have a significant political role. The liberation movement created concern in political and governmental circles in the United States. In 1980 the Santa Fe Committee of the Republican Party in a policy paper about United States interests in Latin America

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<sup>53</sup> This excerpt from the 1983 lecture at the University of Toronto is taken from an earlier edition of the text published as *The Shift Within Latin American Theology*, Toronto: Regis College Press, 1983, p. 13.

advised the Reagan Administration to take steps to counter the influence of that movement because of its threat to U.S. interests.<sup>54</sup> The liberation theologians had certainly not taken over their Church but the impact which they did achieve within it had begun to alter the image and model of that institution.

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<sup>54</sup> Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, p. 3, 4

## Chapter Six

### The Community Called Church

#### Vanguard and Masses

Juan Carlos Segundo first came to general conclusions about the nature and function of the Church and the need for reform in 1968. It is to his particular concept of the Church, its political role and relations with ideologies as means and ends politically that we now turn. The influences on his thinking were diverse. The Vatican II Council which had ended its work three years before, and the Episcopal Conference of Latin America which had taken place in 1968, provided global and regional affirmations of the positions of Church leaders. Segundo's reflections on these events were combined with the experience of discussions with hundreds of lay people at a research centre concerned with religion and society in Montevideo. He was one of the founders of the Centro Pedro Fabro in that city. The results were embodied in *The Community Called Church* in 1973.<sup>1</sup> While universal in principle, the immediate focus was Latin America.

Indeed, an American author, subjecting two opposed types of liberation theology to a very careful examination, said that he did not find it surprising that "Segundo, coming from secularized Uruguay, represents an elitist approach, while Scannone [Juan Carlos Scannone], from Catholic Argentina, extols Roman Catholicism as the national religion, and Peronism as the political expression of the popular will".<sup>2</sup> I am skeptical about how far one can carry this type of analysis of religion and culture in terms of

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<sup>1</sup> Part of a series appearing between 1968 and 1972. The English language editions were published in 1973 and 1974. *The Community Called Church* was published in 1973: Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis Books, as Volume One of the series given the title *A Theology for Artisans of a New Humanity* by this publisher. Segundo produced a second series of five volumes with an essentially christological emphasis, published by Orbis Books as *Jesus of Nazareth, Yesterday and Today* (Spanish language editions from 1982 to 1985, the ones published by Orbis Books between 1984 and 1988)

<sup>2</sup> Michael R. Candelaria, *Popular Religion and Liberation: the Dilemma of Liberation Theology*, Albany, N.Y., State University of New York Press, 1990, p.103

national societies and political movements when, in the case of the split within the liberation movement in the Roman Catholic Church, the debate was going on in the interested circles throughout Latin America. At the same time, the observation is probably a useful reminder to consider the contexts of theologies. Segundo and Scannone are remote from the times, places and events relevant to Tillich's theology. The basic issues which he raised about religion and culture, however, emerge again in this different setting.

Segundo's rejection of a "Church of the Poor" as a guiding concept for liberation theology has already been noted. He was prepared to admit that his particular concept of the ecclesial community might be seen as aristocratic and elitist, but he was ready to defend it nevertheless. He had to deal with the Church and its deficiencies as he had seen them in history, particularly the history of Latin America. He was influenced by the writings of others about decisive, or creative, minorities in relation to masses, both in political and in religious affairs. In *The Community Called Church*, he posed the issue "Church of the Masses or Sign-Community?"<sup>3</sup> In that book, in the *Liberation of Theology* and in other writings, he dealt with the theme extensively, referring to the evidence and judgements offered by sources as diverse as Lenin and Ortega y Gasset.

Segundo's primary concern was the liberation of the poorest classes from the economic oppression of capitalism. His idea of liberation also included the goal of ridding the Church of an obsession with obtaining the maximum number of members with minimum spiritual obligations at the expense of the quality and authenticity of Christian belief. Like others very much committed to a concept of a vanguard, he argued that the creative minority would serve the interests of the majority in the Church as well as the interests of society generally. He wanted the Church to be less concerned with its

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<sup>3</sup> One of the headings for Chapter Four "Obligations of the Ecclesial Community", p. 78.

internal affairs, with obtaining conversions and with promising salvation in another world. It should be much more concerned with offering services to society which would express the core beliefs from Scripture and the greatest of Christian traditions and experience. We shall have to try to extract from his writings further indications of the theological emphases, traditional or innovative, which he thought should guide this purified *Ecclesia*. The conclusions reached at Vatican II, and one of the leading documents of that Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, were obviously animating influences for Segundo, along with his work in the Peter Faber Centre.

One brief, but revealing, statement of Segundo's vision of the Church was pointed to at the beginning of this thesis.

Thus, if it used the right approach, a Church that is numerically universal could likewise become a leaven of light and critical judgement at the same time—though these latter qualities are restricted to minorities today, thanks to the effort they expend.<sup>4</sup>

Even Segundo's critics would not object too much to this aspiration. From the principal sources in his writings already indicated, the following passages amplify the general trend of his thinking. Under the general headings of "obligations of the ecclesial community" and of "the Church and political power" he spoke of the Church he knew and of what should change.

We have tried to show that the Church is a sacramental community with a mission among men, not a closed circle in which the Christian lives out his faith and ensures his own salvation. Why, then, is it more likely to appear as a dominion rather than as a form of service? Why does it present itself as a maternalistic entity committed to outdated systems rather than as fraternal, friendly entity transcending specific civilizations. Considering its actual cast, is it surprising that other religions, and even governments see it as a rival or an enemy? What aspect does it wear in Latin America, for example?<sup>5</sup>

Segundo provided a historical perspective from which a few extracts should be sufficient

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<sup>4</sup> *Liberation of Theology*, p. 204.

<sup>5</sup> *The Community Called Church*, p. 91-92.

to indicate his assessment, which is close to that of other liberation theologians. The Council of Trent “did not introduce magical factors, but it did open the way for them”.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, “the faith lost its dynamic character by being identified with the culture in which it was expressed”.<sup>7</sup> Segundo urged the Church to move away from the “traditional formulas” of acquired superstructures, in order to act in accordance with the reality of faith, an “inexpressible core”. Dialogue, even with non-believers, “is forcing the Christian to realize that many of his positions on this subject are not products of the Good News but atavistic remnants of social prejudice, inertia, psychic distortion, and crypto-heresy which have been masquerading under the cloak of faith”.<sup>8</sup>

What did Segundo think about the majority, the mass of members, even in a Church moving away from those acquired superstructures? Was he actually hoping for a spiritually enlightened, intellectual and socially conscious sect as a model? His sociological and historical analysis, like Tillich’s account of the myths of origin and their political consequences, is extensive and raises many questions. Again, perhaps some extracts from his responses to the obvious question about “church or sect” serves the purposes of our search for at least the rough outlines of a Church of the future.

Segundo did not want the Church to lose members because of a thrust for change, promoted by a minority, which could become perfectionist in its demands. He welcomed the advice of Karl Rahner about degrees of response to the Christian message. Some within the Church receive and accept the full Christian response, becoming active agents in a dialogue between love and faith. The nature of that response reaches others only in “partial doses”.<sup>9</sup> Within the Church, however, those members can learn from the

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, p.39

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, p.46

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, p.69

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, p.60

first group and resolve doubts and hesitations. Segundo also recognized the possibility of learning from a new hermeneutical circle, one with a different purpose from that of the formal philosophical and Scriptural hermeneutics he had followed. The new one would involve a comparison between two elements. One was “a culture that is logically and conceptually structured in a tight-knit way”. It is not clear to me whether he was referring to the religious culture of the Church, dominated by the rigorous structure of theology and ecclesiastical governance, or to culture in a wider sense. The second element is “the wisdom of the common people, the content of their rituals and imaginative creation, and the internal logic of their strangest attitudes”.<sup>10</sup> Having made this concession, Segundo warned that the Gospel message could not be fully identified with popular wisdom.

In order to understand what Segundo meant by vanguard and mass, and what he is advocating for the Church, we have to note the connection between concientization and the vanguard and then the interactions which he anticipated could take place between minority and majority. In the first place, the minority is neither aristocratic nor elitist in any customary sense. An important distinction must be made; “literacy training can be a mass process but concientization cannot. To push people towards situations that are more complex, difficult and intermediate is to create minorities”.<sup>11</sup> The individuals accepting the need for such a transition face the “difficulty tied up with passing from individualistic motivation [“salvation” in a traditional sense, as Segundo saw it] to a communitarian, social and universal one”.<sup>12</sup> The reward of a “dawning of conscious awareness, explicitation and reflection” is “not simply a higher perfection but a whole new world”.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Liberation of Theology*, p. 266.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>12</sup> *The Community Called Church*, p. 50.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 54.

Segundo stopped short of calling this transition a “conversion” presumably to avoid confusion with regard to traditional religious language. When he described full membership in the Church, understood by concientization, as entailing risks, and the hard work of building a city, then the traditional echoes were certainly there.<sup>14</sup> The task was “revolutionary” but the revolution was “implied in Christ’s message”.<sup>15</sup> Whether described as transition or conversion, the process was “liberation” in Segundo’s perception of the effects. The following passages should be read in the light of the research among laity carried out by the pastoral team at the Peter Faber Center. The laity in this case included believers and non-believers, according to Segundo.

One feeling is a feeling of *liberation*. This is particularly evident among lay people. If they are conscious of their mission, they feel an obligation to dialogue with non-believers and to focus the eye of faith on the events taking place in present-day human history.

.....  
When they are shown that this association [orthodox belief as a condition of personal salvation] is simply the result of oversimplification, mass Christianity, and a religion kept at the infantile level, they feel quite liberated.

.....  
To move from such a brand of Christianity to the one offered here is to have a certain feeling of anxiety. Now Christianity must be lived as creative principle; open to dialogue, sensitive to new problems, obliged to offer new formulations. Such anxiety is a necessary partner for any and all liberation.<sup>16</sup>

The concept of “vanguard” in some parts of Segundo’s writings is hard to distinguish from conventional “leadership” in any institution. When it is explained in religious terms, along with a demand for social justice in a particular Church and in a particular region, then the significance is more revolutionary than it might appear elsewhere. We are still left with the question of the mass, since the “partial doses” evaluation of Karl Rahner must apply to those affected in some way by concientization in Latin America, outside the ranks of the liberation leaders themselves. Segundo deals with

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<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p.135.

this question in a dialectical manner, not very typical of the liberation theologians generally, but closer to that of Tillich. Considerations of energy, quantity and quality enter into the relationship between masses and minorities; they “represent two necessary poles of the economy of energy that rules the universe, they are the quantitative and qualitative poles, present in any and every human group, but equally present in the patterns of conduct of each and every human individual”.<sup>17</sup>

By means of a dialectic which historical acts verify, the accumulation of the quantitative, the massive, the majoritarian constitutes a continuous and always new offering made to the minority to assume a new stage of the direction of the historical movement, not contrary to the mass but to the benefit of all.<sup>18</sup>

In defending his position against charges that he was elitist and aristocratic Segundo made the point in different language: “any and all minority growth simultaneously conditions and is conditioned by a rise in the level of mass conduct”.<sup>19</sup> God uses the numerical few as a leverage point. Again, far from being liberative, or radical, the basic idea could just as easily be used by ecclesiastical orthodoxy, past or present, (honestly or not) as a response to allegations of “pathologies of power”. That Segundo found it necessary to pay so much attention to the minority/majority issue tells us more about his critics, from any direction, than it does about new concepts of liberation. The issue was one of internal Church affairs, in a new era, since the popular religion with which Segundo had to contend did not pose any difficult questions, political or theological, for the hierarchy.

Some important members of the Roman Catholic hierarchy were influenced by liberation theology and the processes of change in which they had participated in the

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<sup>17</sup> *Evolution and Guilt*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1974, p. 38 (Volume Five of *Theology for the Artisans of a New Humanity*).

<sup>18</sup> *La Cristiandad, una utopia?*, 2 vols., Montevideo: Mimeografica Luz, 1964, p. 38, (quoted in Michael R. Candelaria, *Popular Religion and Liberation; the Dilemma of Liberation Theology*, p.93)

<sup>19</sup> *Liberation of Theology*, p. 226.

Vatican II Council. They provided an opening at the subsequent Episcopal Conference in Medellin for some of the principal political points of the liberation movement to be made at the Conference and to be included in its Declarations. The report of Segundo on the opportunity for a revisionist and determined minority to gain a certain respectability is relevant to his arguments about the role of a vanguard.

The ambivalent position of liberation theology vis-a-vis ecclesiastical structures, its uncertain position between acceptance on the one hand, and mistrust or neglect on the other, meant that the groups influenced by this theology developed *within* the Church rather than outside the Church as heretical groups. There was no break or rupture. These groups sought to grow and for their growth they took advantage of all the means supplied by a Church that was structured for the sake of the masses and directed towards the latter.<sup>20</sup>

The liberation movement which gained momentum in the 1960's and 1970's has not left the Roman Catholic Church. The admonitions of Rome in the 1980's, disciplinary measures against individuals, the power and political discretion of Pope John Paul II in appointing bishops and changes in the political climate in Latin America have imposed limits on that momentum and influence. Hopes for emergence of a Church of the Poor, like Tillich's hopes for religious socialism as a civilizing force in Europe, have been disappointed. Our primary concern in this study, however, is to determine what Segundo's concept of a "Sign Community" means in the general context of the Church and culture in this century. His idea of a vanguard, and his realism about decisive political forces in Latin America, suggest a sagacity about the pace and nature of change in the face of political and cultural contingencies not easily foreseen..

Two fundamental questions must be put to Segundo about the Sign Community. Will the Community choose to be associated, on a continuing basis, with one ideology, such as socialism? What modified body of doctrine, generally comprehensible to the masses, will guide the Community and replace unnecessary dogmatic encumbrances and

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<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 233.

infantile religious beliefs in new efforts of evangelisation? These latter impediments are, of course, the ones alleged by Segundo. They may seem unduly strident coming from a member of that Church. They are close to the assessments made by Tillich of traditional Christian dogma in general. They are no harsher than the ones made by another Roman Catholic dissident, Hans Küng.

It is institutionalized religion, the Christian churches, which at least in Europe are in crisis because of fossilization and isolation (in the case of the Catholic church) or exhaustion and lack of profile (in the case of the Protestant church), which they have brought down on themselves.<sup>21</sup>

### *Church and Ideology*

Segundo has provided us with his philosophy about faith and ideologies.<sup>22</sup> A distinction must be made between two different sets of criteria which form part of this discussion. One set has to do with the attitudes of an individual about the relationship between his or her religious faith and political ideologies. The other refers to the position to be taken by the Church in particular political circumstances. Segundo's essay, "Capitalism versus Socialism: *Crux Theologica*", was noted in the preceding chapter, particularly in relation to state ownership of the means of production. A quick reading of that essay might suggest that he wanted the Church to make advocacy of a socialist system the central theme in its social teaching.<sup>23</sup> He stopped short of doing that, although his position in that essay is ambiguous with regard to how he thought the Church should make its views known in the *Crux Theologica* which he posed.

The central point in his argument, I think, is that it was the "choice between

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<sup>21</sup> *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*, New York: Crossroad, 1991, p. 45.

<sup>22</sup> *Faith and Ideologies*, Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1984 (original Spanish, 1982). This is Volume One of the series *Jesus of Nazareth, Yesterday and Today*.

<sup>23</sup> in Rosino Gibellini, *Frontiers of Theology in Latin America*.

capitalism and socialism” (my italics) in the particular circumstances in Latin America which most concerned him. That choice required theological discernment and judgment, because of the ethical issues and social tragedies involved. He was well aware that supporters of capitalism would construct their theological arguments on the basis of a confrontation between individual freedom and atheist Marxism. Segundo defined his point of departure.

The *first* point has to do with what I mean by “socialism” and “capitalism” here. By “socialism” I do not mean a complete, long-term social project—hence one that is endowed with a particular ideology or philosophy.<sup>24</sup>

He then referred to the issue of state ownership of the means of production. This might well seem an inconsistency on his part with regard to his definition of ideology since state ownership has been a central element in the Marxist case from the beginning. Segundo’s attention remained concentrated, however, on what could be done “here and now” (that is state control of one sector of the economy) to counter the effects of what he, and other liberation theologians, saw as the effects of corrupt, brutal and ethically intolerable capitalism in Latin America. Internationally those effects took the form of an unjust investment and trading relationship between the wealthiest nations and his own region. When European political theologians, sympathetic in principle to “liberation” in Latin America, still warned the Latin Americans about naivety with respect to Marxism, and about too optimistic assumptions about immediate political action leading to the Kingdom of God, Segundo had his replies.

The European advocates of political theology demand that we Latin Americans present them with a proposal for a socialist society that is guaranteed in advance to avoid the defects evident in existing brands of socialism. Why do they not demand the same thing of Jesus? Why do they not demand that Jesus, before telling someone that his faith has saved him and curing him, provide some guarantee that the cure will definitely not be followed by worse illnesses?<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p. 249.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 255

He [Jesus] points to “signs of the times”, to concrete transformations effected by himself in the historical present and then entrusted to his disciples both for the present and the future.<sup>26</sup>

If we add to these statements the ones already noted in the previous chapter about unknown effects of a revolution and about the actions of Jesus coming before theology [substitute ideology in this context], we can see that Segundo and the Europeans are really talking past one another. Segundo was creating an issue, posing the question as to whether conditions could possibly be worse if the state did take direct action against specific injustices of capitalism. He did not wish to see the Church become a political agent or to be committed to a party. As for Marxism, we read (this time in *Faith and Ideologies*) about what Segundo hoped to do.

My aim was to subject Marxism to logical analysis and delimit its *proper* and *positive* dimensions. Those who see Marxism as their be-all and end-all, and who refuse to analyze it from a critical and historical perspective, will tend to see my approach as an attack on Marxism, but that cannot be helped. Nor can I help the fact that those who view Marxism as the worst of evils will regard my treatment as support for Marxism. [...] I hope that I have shown that Marxism and liberalism are one-sided ideologies insofar as they disregard their own flaws, the complexity of reality, and the possibility of their claims being compatible with anthropological faith, indeed with a specific faith.<sup>27</sup>

This was not a very radical position in a region in which Marxism had made important inroads by Segundo's time, in which state interventionism in the economy was well-known and in which there had been at least one major movement of religious messianism with a Marxist orientation.<sup>28</sup> In the immediate context of military intervention against leftist and democratic governments, Segundo took his risks.

In his general philosophy about faith and ideologies, Segundo advocated a flexible position for the Church.

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<sup>26</sup> *ibid*, p. 253

<sup>27</sup> *Faith and Ideologies*, *op. cit.*, p. 300

<sup>28</sup> José Carlos Mariátegui, in Peru, combined Marxism, his Indian heritage and a Catholic upbringing in a messianic/revolutionary movement. See Edwin Williamson, *The Penguin History of Latin America*, London: Penguin Books, 1992, p. 522.

How, then, can Christian tradition be simultaneously normative and liberative as it passes through the ecclesial community? Certainly not by offering us an inherited set of ready-made answers. It must assume tradition to be a process of *learning to learn*. Each bit of transcendent data which comes into play here serves as a launching pad; the more solid it is, the deeper and further the problems we may explore.<sup>29</sup>

The process of learning to learn, or of primary and secondary learning, was related to Segundo's hermeneutical circle in the previous chapter. It refers not only to faith and ideologies but also to inherited cultural traditions, called "Christian", which "today do not belong to the Church either". These are not "clear and indisputable (sacred) answers to moral and social problems". Segundo cites the relevance rather of secular data "more in line with the complexity of human problem-posing and problem-solving", and to the Biblical criteria of Paul's concept of new freedom with respect to "the bondage of the law". Recognition of these criteria "can ensure that Christianity will retain or regain its true character as a factor fostering cultural flexibility".<sup>30</sup>

For Segundo, the problems of relating a specific faith, with its ethical and spiritual criteria, to ideologies systematizing and regulating the human affairs of the day, had to be dealt with by means of the processes mentioned above. Christianity did not have to refer only to dogmatic criteria. It had its own abundant cultural experience.

It combines optimum possibilities for cultural transmission with a rich store of profound experiences and reflections on ethics and the meaning of life. That store has been accumulated by human beings over the course of many centuries<sup>31</sup>

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Religious faith is a prolongation of anthropological faith. It makes use of transcendent data provided by a body of testimony concerning meaning and values. The testimony is incarnated in a series of witnesses linked together by their common quest. This approach leads people to *first* accept certain human values and *then* to recognize their sacred or absolute sense.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p. 338.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 337.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, p. 336.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

This line of thought at least *appears* to be close to that of Tillich about the tensions between autonomy and heteronomy being resolved in theonomy. With his own Latin American context, as always, immediately in mind, Segundo approaches the questions about faith and ideologies in a familiar environment. “So I focus on the Christian faith here because it is related, however confusedly and ambiguously, with the actual cultural traditions of our Latin American countries”.<sup>33</sup> In political experience, “if we hearken back to the earlier customs of our peoples, then socialism would be a much more natural approach to modernity for us than is capitalism”.<sup>34</sup>

The question raised about the Church and a possible commitment to one ideology, so far as Segundo is concerned, is a difficult one. I am not sure that we can get much more in the way of an answer than what has been summarized above by reference to particularly relevant works. The advocacy of flexibility, and of the application of the Church’s own experience and learning to ideologies, does raise a subsidiary question. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith defined tolerable limits to support by the Church for political movements seeking social justice. Segundo contested their definitions. Did he, in that same political context in the 1980’s, recognize the dangers to society created by ideological zeal not moderated by a sense of consequences and of social reality?

He was concerned about the impact on what he called “social ecology” of revolutionary and near-revolutionary situations, of insurrection by armed guerilla groups and of a theology of revolution which was not supported by the leaders of the liberation movement. He warned about a “temptation to violence”.

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid*, p. 335

<sup>34</sup> *ibid*, p. 330

There is such a temptation to the extent that one loses sight of the fact that even the institutionalized violence of years and centuries has ended up constituting a certain *social ecology*. That does not justify it, of course. We have the right and even the duty to change it if, as in this case, we are convinced that its foundations rest on injustice. But changing a whole ecology is not like changing a tire. The possible temptation lies in the fact that we may decide to change the ecology in any way we can, even if we have to *do violence to it*.<sup>35</sup>

A civil war, he warned, was worse than a foreign war in its lasting and destructive effects on the normal institutions of society. It eroded civilized restraints on a clash of ideological commitments and political interests. The “high priests” of the guerilla movements and the protagonists of “prolonged clandestine war” did not realize what they were doing to their own members as well as to society as a whole.<sup>36</sup> “Wittingly or unwittingly, they destroyed the political future of the parties which were seeking the same end through legal means [...] The same holds true for other legal pressure groups: e.g. labor unions, the press, the mass media [...] enormous ecological destruction”.<sup>37</sup> In this chain of events, “an emotional reaction by an upset, insecure middle class” led that class, holding a pivotal position with regard to power, to support military intervention and the imposition of a national security state, as a stabilizing factor. That type of repressive regime “did not even succeed in being *conservative*”.<sup>38</sup> Segundo found one of the initial causes in such a sequence to lie in an “activist urgency”, associated with “political pessimism which, perhaps unconsciously, had become systematic”.<sup>39</sup> In other words, an assumption as to the probable inevitability of an armed confrontation led to the fulfillment of an expectation.

In such a crisis situation, what is the role of the Church as the “leaven of light and

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<sup>35</sup> *ibid*, p. 284

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*, pp. 286, 287

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*, p. 289

<sup>38</sup> *ibid*, p. 290, p.285

<sup>39</sup> *ibid*, p. 285

critical judgement” desired by Segundo? We have noted the various criteria which he has stipulated in order that the Church might better act in accordance with its essential role as the bearer of the Christian message. Reconciling them, while bearing in mind the actual history of religion and politics in Latin America since the Medellin Conference of 1968 is not easy. Setting forth counsels of perfection on each point, and then saying that ecclesiastical leaders in each national Church, with guidance from Rome, will have to make their decisions at the time, does not really do justice to Segundo’s reflections on “the Community Called the Church”. His reflections have been realistic, and politically shrewd, as can be seen both in his assessments of the roles of vanguards and masses and in his analysis of a crisis momentum threatening the basic institutions of the social fabric. How are his criteria for action to be related and ranked? The following list comes from my interpretation of his contentions, not from a summary put forward by Segundo.

(1) The most emphatic point made is that when there is no doubt about serious social injustice perceived by leaders of the Church, some action must be taken. That action is not necessarily intended to support, or question, an ideological perspective or a governmental policy of a long-range nature, but to initiate action by others to deal with the injustice. In policies of economic development, such consequences are obvious. “Structural failure was much more than a theory of oppression or imperialism; it was a *fact*”.<sup>40</sup> “All this merely proves, if proof were necessary, that the situation described above is a plain and simple fact, not the theoretical formulation of people who hold a particular ideology”.<sup>41</sup>

(2) This obligation for action is an indispensable part of the vision of the Church as a community offering light and contributing critical judgement in difficult decisions about human affairs. The responsibility rests primarily with the vanguard elements in the

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<sup>40</sup> *ibid*, p. 280

<sup>41</sup> *ibid*, p. 281

Church and it is a qualitative one. The acquisition of new members, on the assumption that the size of the institution will make it more effective, is misguided. Quantitative aims are valid if they are subordinate to the primary obligation.

(3) The Church must remain independent from centres of power in society whatever their ideological orientation. They can then be freer to criticize political actions with regard to the immediate implications or consequences of such actions in society.

(4) The Church does not aspire to be a centre of power, or a political agent, itself. It does not judge the possible viability of political theories used by those responsible for governance. It judges the means used to implement theories, and the consequences.

(5) Effectiveness on the part of the Church in carrying out its primary obligation requires a strong inclination, and an ability, to engage in two way communication with representatives of those centres of power in which decisions of immediate societal impact are made. The Church has to be flexible in learning to learn. It must draw on its own sources of doctrinal commitment, tradition and experience. It must listen with equal attention to the lessons of general human experience and reason and the wisdom they have generated.

Segundo has to be taken seriously indeed when he points out the need for hard work by a minority, and willingness to take risks, as conditions for the proper discharge of the obligations of the Church as he saw them. He did not discount the civilizing influence of the Church following traditional concepts of a social role, particularly in Latin America. These were concepts which relied first on sacraments and Scriptural teachings within the walls and then on the pressures which the Church might exert on the government in power to act compassionately and rationally in carrying out its obligations. He did not discount either what was already being done by minorities to carry out the obligations which he defined. His concept of a model of a true Christian community was intended to support, and to help to interpret the original mandate of Scripture.

In order to understand how he understood that mandate we have to take note of

some of main elements in his theology. In his progress from Scripture to prophetic demand to liberation and to politics they became radical indeed. At the same time, he did not claim to have discovered absolute truth in religion or in politics and was open to conduct a dialogue with all contending parties.

### *Mandate of Scripture*

Tillich offered his systematic theology and his elaborate apologetics to all churches as the intellectual structure for a Christian Church, in essence. Segundo seems to have expected to remain a Roman Catholic and to make the most of liberating breakthroughs at the Vatican II Council and at the Episcopal Conference of Latin America in order to maintain a momentum towards the application of Christian principles in a struggle against injustice in the world. As we have noted, he welcomed *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World) and found in it a base for his own efforts. Nevertheless, there were ambiguities in that document which he found disturbing.

One tendency sees the world and its history as being disconnected in itself from redemption, which operates supernaturally within the Church and unites human values to their divine source through religion. The other tendency sees only one vocation, one history, and one end result, even though the unity of the religious and the non-religious in Christ constitutes a datum of faith [...] even though it does not provide readymade solutions to the problem of history; and even though we do not know to what extent God wills to transmit it effectively, in an explicit manner, to the concrete human beings with whom we are engaged in dialogue. The texts of the Council which are the most clear theologically accord with the second line of thought, but the recurrence of other expressions that do not accord with it shows us that a problem persists here.<sup>42</sup>

That Segundo had reason to feel doubt as to how far Vatican II had advanced along the directions which he espoused is pointed out by Marsha Hewitt in examining both

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<sup>42</sup> *Grace and the Human Condition*, Maryknoll, N.Y.:Orbis Books, 1973 (original Spanish, 1968), p. 133,134 (Volume Two of *A Theology for Artisans of a New Humanity*).

theology and social theory in his writings. His arguments about support for liberation theories in *Gaudium et Spes* “is very much based upon a selective reading of this conciliar document. [...] Not *all* conciliar texts are cited in justification of liberation theology. The claim that liberation theology must be viewed as an application of Vatican II [...] is by now somewhat problematic, given the direction of the Catholic Church since Vatican II, which seems to many to be away from the council.”<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, Hewitt points out, “the later methodological writing of Segundo [...] goes far beyond Vatican II precisely in the area of attempting to render the Catholic faith and the Catholic Church relevant to the contemporary world.”<sup>44</sup>

Segundo has taken a place among Roman Catholic theologians who have moved away from earlier doctrinal scholastic theology, even from particular biblical and sacramental emphases, towards historically and politically oriented points of view. He was influenced by the general evolutionary theories of Teilhard de Chardin.

A dialectical thread runs through Segundo’s thinking in the sense that he revels in reversals. Like Jesus’ parables he turns many of the accepted conclusions of theology on their head. Christianity is universally relevant, but everyone is not called to be a Christian; Jesus is God means God is Jesus; yes grace is synergistic; yes, human beings do construct the kingdom of God. Segundo’s interpretation of Christianity depicts it as an active and creative, one might even say aggressive force in the world.<sup>45</sup>

An analysis of Segundo’s theology following a theme of “efficacious love” traces what the author sees as shifts away from orthodoxy, from the sacred to the profane, from the static to the dynamic, and particularly from the individual to the social.

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<sup>43</sup> *From Theology to Social Theory: Juan Luis Segundo and the Theology of Liberation*, New York et al.: Peter Lang, 1990, p. 159.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Roger Haight, in the “Foreword”, in Theresa Lowe Ching, *Efficacious Love: its Meaning and Function in the Theology of Juan Luis Segundo*, Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1989, p. ix.

Where this shift is most clearly evident is in Segundo's reinterpretation of the Church which is, perhaps, his most significant doctrinal focus, specifically in terms of the extent and depth of his treatment of it.[...] Segundo redefines the Church essentially as "leaven" permeating society, as a committed "minority" in service of the rest of humanity. It makes known the source and goal of the love that is efficaciously at work in human existence. Faith and sacraments, the distinguishing features of the Church community, take on a functional role, faith orienting Christian life in service of the absolute value, love; the sacraments fashioning a community for transforming, liberative praxis. Segundo's is a Church which is by definition in dialogue with the rest of humanity.<sup>46</sup>

While this theology opens doors for dialogue with the rest of humanity, the same author, Theresa Lowe Ching, also points out that it is a theology which leaves out of the discussion "important dimensions of traditional ecclesiology", "the ritual dimension", "the contemplative aspect of the sacraments" and the "mystery which also grounds that reality [the negative thrust of evolution] and the question of human liberty that is involved".<sup>47</sup> Dialogue with the rest of humanity may, therefore, have been achieved at the risk of losing contact with people already in the Church who value those aspects of the Christian experience noted immediately above. It is also relevant to our examination of new models of the Church that Tillich and Segundo, beginning with a demand for radical change in orthodoxy, developed quite different concepts of the relative importance of fundamental aspects of the Christian experience. For Tillich, after 1945, the shift was away from the political, or social, to the personal, or individual, that is to an ontological and existential understanding of what he saw as Catholic substance.

The two theologies are not necessarily incompatible but they point to a dilemma for the advocates of radical change away from orthodoxy, both with relation to doctrine and with relation to the actual, and tangible phenomenon of the Church itself. The

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<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, p. 134, 135.

questions which arise are difficult ones to answer. Is there sufficient coherence with regard to the objectives of change that varied emphases on objectives are still mutually supportive? The alternative would be to conclude that new models are as diverse, and apparently incompatible, as the separate institutional confessions which have existed for centuries. The other question has to do with members of the Church as a whole. Segundo thought of them as a mass, accustomed to familiarity and stability, adhering more or less to ecclesiastical definitions of orthodoxy and to what they understood of it. Would they stay with a Church changing rapidly or apparently losing confidence in what had always seemed secure?

Segundo contested any assumption that what might seem a secure orthodoxy was as united and coherent in a doctrinal sense as the outer evidence of ecclesiastical control might suggest. He raised the issue of ideology and societal pressure as revealed in history. "Would it be too much to admit that sacramental theology has been influenced more by unconscious social pressures than by the gospel itself".<sup>48</sup> Images of God within the Church can be fundamentally different; one image "allows dehumanization" [in Segundo's liberation sense]; another image "unceasingly fights against such things". There is really no common faith, but this split is covered by hollow doctrinal formulas.

Here is Segundo's answer to one of the questions raised above about "security". It is better to recognize reality and seek a more authentic image of God, both from Scripture and from human experience and wisdom.<sup>49</sup> There is no reason to fear change. Scripture itself, or at least parts of it, point to continuing revelation by the "Spirit of Truth". "Jesus' language is very clear. It points not towards a better understanding of what has already been spoken but towards the learning of new things".<sup>50</sup> New things will

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<sup>48</sup> *Liberation of Theology*, op.cit., p.41

<sup>49</sup> *Our Idea of God*, Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis Books, 1974, p. 43, (Volume III of *A Theology for Artisans of a New Humanity*)

<sup>50</sup> *Liberation of Theology*, op.cit.,p.120

be learned, and applied, through a “succession of ideologies vis-a-vis the concrete problems of history”, through a “revelatory education process”.<sup>51</sup> Segundo also had an answer to the question about a certain coherence of approach among those advocating radical departures from orthodoxy, an answer on behalf of liberation theology generally, not just from his particular perspective in that field.

Liberation theology is a profoundly ecumenical theology. It seems that the Christian’s concern to collaborate in the process of liberating mankind unites him more effectively and surely with other Christians than does any attempt to resolve age-old theoretical problems. Liberation poses changes of such magnitude that Christians of whatever denomination feel closer to those who have made the same option in history than they do to other members of their own denomination. This ecumenism extends beyond the boundaries of Christianity, in fact, uniting all people of good will in decisive options and separating those of “ill will” wherever they are found.<sup>52</sup>

This strong ecumenical inclination on Segundo’s part obviously was meant to apply to vanguards sympathetic to his political concepts of mission. Conservative Protestants and Catholics skeptical about the political colouring of liberation in Latin America would have their own trans-denominational sympathies. The strict application of “liberation” as “ecumenism” would simply create new divisions among the churches.

Segundo rejected an “apolitical love”, “in a world where politics is the fundamental human dimension”.<sup>53</sup> “Politics” in the profane, and daily sense in human affairs, however, even with some roughly coherent ideology to provide criteria for decision, is at a considerable distance from what is better described as “polity” in the thinking of the churches. Polity there depends on a comprehensive set of values and objectives with Scriptural, theological and traditional roots to apply to judgements on human affairs. Segundo no doubt intended to cover all these aspects of the political dimension but there are few distinctions made when such distinctions are important.

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<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, p. 71.

In his advocacy of a new religious evangelization, universal and ecumenical in scope, he proposed using a “hierarchy of truths” in doctrinal presentations. He borrowed the phrase from Vatican II documents. This would involve an admission that “the truths in which a Christian believes stand in varying degrees of proximity to the foundation of that Christian’s faith”.<sup>54</sup> A theological principle of “variable relationship of the truths” with foundational ones, “valid for ecumenism” could have wider application.<sup>55</sup>

Segundo did not then put forward a minimal doctrinal statement. We can only assume from the general nature of his theology that the essence of it would be the liberation theology call for efficacious love applied to combatting social injustice. This proposal is consistent with a realization that if the Church wished to influence all the circles of society involved in the political dimension of society, it would have to be able to speak, and to be heard, in the appropriate language. It could not imply an attempt at formal conversion or an acceptance of dogmatic formulas of belief in the traditional manner. The point not dealt with in this proposal is the question of the effect on committed members of churches of a hierarchy in which some “truths” in an interdependent structure of belief no longer seem important.

The fact that Segundo selected particular elements in his theological exposition and paid little attention to others, as noted above, does not mean that he failed to present his analyses of a number of foundational beliefs. Although they do not constitute a system comparable to Tillich’s, the two five-volume sets already mentioned do provide a comprehensive indication of his interpretation of those beliefs, certainly consistent with the hermeneutical approach embodied in *The Liberation of Theology* and *The Liberation of Dogma*. In his Scriptural exegesis, he believes that there is a real unity of teaching

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<sup>54</sup> “The Legacy of Columbus and the Hierarchy of Christian Truths” in *Signs of the Times: Theological Reflections*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993, p.177.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, p. 182.

based on two elements: “One element is permanent and unique *faith*. The other is changing and bound up with different historical circumstances: *ideologies*”.<sup>56</sup>

The following excerpts from three of the ten volumes are revealing both with respect to hermeneutics and to political purpose in the circumstances of the present. In *Our Idea of God* he faces a problem which bothered all the liberation theologians, that is the legitimacy of violence in response to what they saw as intolerable injustice. Segundo concluded that “total, exclusive opposition between love and violence is not historical”.<sup>57</sup> The divine plan would have “the measure of violence and impersonal action which love requires to be as effective as possible”.<sup>58</sup> The Church had, for centuries, “projected on to God the great limitations of occidental society” and therefore a critical exegesis was required to perceive the ideology of the times.<sup>59</sup> Segundo ended this volume with the enigmatic suggestion that “our notion of God must never cease to retravel the road which runs from atheism to faith”.<sup>60</sup>

The christology of the second set of volumes, *Jesus of Nazareth, Yesterday and Today*, provides another useful means of measuring the ideological commitment made by Segundo in his vision of the Church. A.J.Hennelly, editor of and commentator upon several liberation theologies and documents, thought that this second set of books constituted the most profound work of liberation theology. In turning away from intricate theology and exegetical hypotheses about Jesus he was attempting to present the essence of the New Testament to ordinary members of the Church. Roger Haight, who joined Hennelly in making introductory comments in one of the volumes of this set, thought that

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<sup>56</sup> *Liberation of Theology*, p. 116.

<sup>57</sup> Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis Books, 1974 (original Spanish, 1970), p.164 (Vol. III of *A Theology for Artisans of a New Humanity*).

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 178, 179.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, p. 182.

Segundo offered a critical reworking of the evolutionary framework of Teilhard de Chardin, with particular reference to his christology.<sup>61</sup>

Segundo criticized traditional christology for a “lack of attention to the historical density and complexity of Jesus’ historical life”. It had been dominated by “ever-growing primacy of top-heavy ‘christologies from above’”. Debates over Crucifixion, Resurrection and Divine Plan, followed by teaching concerning moral lessons and pious examples, had obscured more profound meanings of that life.<sup>62</sup> Segundo reiterated a point made by other contemporary theologians that it was more important to try to understand the nature of the faith and power demonstrated by Jesus in recognizable human situations than to debate the nature of Jesus in a Divine Plan.

This point was made cautiously, however. Themes of Resurrection and Redemption should be balanced, Segundo said, against proclamation of the Kingdom of God with its social and political implications. They should not be mixed. The latter themes involve the examples of an immediate and direct response by Jesus to situations requiring healing and liberation. They are part of the “historical density and complexity” of that life. So far as political repercussions and lessons are concerned, Segundo was equally cautious (more so than in other works!). The lessons we are capable of learning are part of a “slow evolutionary process”.<sup>63</sup> Segundo found ideologies indispensable as a means to an end in human affairs but was suspicious that they might begin to claim absolute truth. He was equally suspicious about theologies. In trying to follow a path to the Kingdom of God beginning with a revelation in the New Testament, no one ideology can transmit that evident faith. We “must accept the slowness of complex evolutionary processes”.

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<sup>61</sup> The comments of Hennelly and Haight are made in a brief preface to *An Evolutionary Approach to Jesus of Nazareth*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988, (Volume Five of *Jesus of Nazareth, Yesterday and Today*)

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, p. 108.

A Christian politics will not be one that builds “Christian democracies”. Instead a truly Christian politics may well adapt to different contexts, bear no specific label, and offer that proper balance of various factors that will enable us to advance a few steps toward democracy on a world wide scale.<sup>64</sup>

As usual with Segundo, the immediate context of Latin America has to be kept in mind in reading a passage such as this one. “Christian democracies” is an example of the scorn of the liberation theologians for Christian Democrats and others who argued that there could be a third way between ideologies of capitalism and socialism. In this christology polemics have to be disentangled from exegesis.

Other liberation theologians were content to take Scriptural texts literally or to interpret them in terms of general religious or political symbolism. Segundo does not ignore the political value of such arguments, particularly in efforts at concientization in the base communities. In *An Evolutionary Approach to Jesus of Nazareth* he emphasized an evolutionary interpretation following the logic of his hermeneutical circle. He also related questions of intellectual and psychic energy to the faith sustaining the Messiah. These were an integral part of his analysis of the roles of minorities and masses and of issues of faith and ideologies. Ideologies would at some point suffer the fate of entropy. Faith was sustained and inherited by a counter-force described as “negentropy”. This force, Segundo said, was as surprising and supernatural as resurrection.<sup>65</sup>

In another volume of this same set, *The Humanist Christology of Paul*, Segundo gives further indications of his method of interpreting the New Testament.<sup>66</sup> The language and philosophy are not ontological but the parallel with Tillich in the humanism attributed to Paul seems clear. Segundo found Paul to be “profoundly faithful to what the historical Jesus expressed about the kingdom of God”.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, p. 120

<sup>66</sup> Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1986 (original Spanish 1982), Vol. III of *Jesus of Nazareth, Yesterday and Today*.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, p. 145.

A transcendent datum already present in humanity is thus made explicit in Christ, and this explicitation alters the force of the datum in each and every human being [...] with Christ the gift becomes a conscious, reasoned force or power, crossing the threshold of reflection.<sup>68</sup>

The humanist emphasis is even more marked in an analysis linking evolutionary interpretation to the deuterio-learning process described elsewhere. The New Testament provides “invaluable transcendent data for living the anthropological faith that has been handed down to us by the chain of witnesses”.<sup>69</sup> That data provides tools for evaluating ideologies, but “does not possess the criteria to decide once and for all whether the objective scientific data of a given system of political efficacy are true, or whether they are the only data to be considered in trying to flesh out certain values in history”.<sup>70</sup>

The emphasis on humanism, anthropology and politics has led some critics to ask whether Segundo was really writing theology, or rather a secular liberation ideology. The following comments by Dennis McCann come from a theological perspective in a comparison of liberation theology with the Christian realism of Reinhold Niebuhr. Compared to the softer liberation theology of Jon Sobrino which would “trivialize” liberation, McCann argues, “the other option, Segundo’s proposal for the liberation of theology critically reflects the *new* Latin American reality”.

With a tough-mindedness that is rare among theologians, he responds by developing the method of concientization to its logical conclusion. But in so doing, he may have dissolved even the minimum continuity necessary to sustain a substantively Christian identity for the basic communities. This option represents the other horn of the dilemma because in it the meaning of liberation is completely politicized. Without a substantively Christian identity clearly reflected in their praxis, these communities in the end may serve only as recruitment centers for secular liberation movements.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>71</sup> *Christian Realism and Liberation Theology: Practical Theologies in Creative Conflict*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1981, p. 231.

Commenting from the perspective of social theory, Marsha Aileen Hewitt agrees with the essential point made by McCann.

With relation to Segundo, it is entirely reasonable to apply the question which McCann poses for liberation itself: "Is liberation theology still recognizable as theology"? It seems to me that very often, Segundo is writing critical social theory in the language of theological symbolism and metaphor.<sup>72</sup>

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In fact, in *The Historical Jesus of the Synoptics*, Segundo develops and elaborates upon the picture of Jesus he presented in the *Liberation of Theology* and *Faith and Ideologies*, wherein Jesus appears more as a paradigmatic, prophetic human figure than as any kind of Incarnated God. In Segundo's view, Jesus does not, and cannot, manifest an abstract, pure revelation of God on a purely religious level. Such an approach to divine revelation reduces the Transcendent to "some sort of sacred magic", which is not faith as he understands it.<sup>73</sup>

Can the case against Segundo as a theologian be sustained? In my view, it is a weak case. Any appeal to the Transcendent (Segundo) or to a Ground of Being (Tillich) disqualifies those who make such an appeal from being categorized as social theorists considering the limitations ascribed to the social sciences in the contemporary world. Those making such an appeal to what they experience as a level of reality make use of social theory because it refers to the immediate social realities which are the starting point of the hermeneutical circle, the world in which praxis takes place. If Karl Rahner considered the liberation theology of Gustavo Gutierrez to be genuine theology, permissible within the Roman Catholic Church, how can we exclude Segundo?

What McCann and Hewitt have done is to emphasize the radical challenge made by a "tough-minded" Segundo to the official theological systems of many churches. A vanguard at ease with theology, social theory and politics might well debate many points in any of these fields, but would not find Segundo's theology and its social emphasis unusual and disturbing. What about the receptivity of the masses among whom,

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<sup>72</sup> *From Theology to Social Theory: Juan Luis Segundo and the Theology of Liberation*, p.165.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, p. 163.

according to Segundo, popular religion is conservative, largely fatalistic and still coloured by magical belief? Concientization in the base communities has had, apparently, a substantial political appeal. The comment of Hewitt about use of theological symbolism and metaphor there may be correct. Beyond the culture of political protest, however, how will the “*new Latin American reality*” with regard to theology be understood? Segundo says very little about this aspect of liberation. Some points he did make should be noted as we complete this survey of the community, the vanguard and the masses, as Segundo saw the Church.

In *The Liberation of Dogma; Faith, Revelation and Dogmatic Teaching Authority* Segundo discusses conditions for “reevangelizing our continent”.

When there is talk of reevangelizing our continent, the aim is to present to Christian adults the genuine “foundation” of Christian faith. They may very well possess many aspects of “Christianity” in the form of information and even attitudes, without ever having truly received the “initial proclamation” of the gospel of Christ.<sup>74</sup>

Early catechesis takes the place of evangelization and does not put people in contact with the “genuine substance” of the Christian message.

If, then, it is necessary to reevangelize, and to do so not with the child but with the adult, will what was presented to the child as Christianity not be called into question? This is the real problem that pastoral practice has to face, especially when it regards catechesis of adults as something extraordinary or ideal. I am not aware of any place on our continent where adult Christians are required to receive a catechesis appropriate to the issues which as young but mature people they must face and for which the “initial proclamation” constituted by Jesus’ message was created.<sup>75</sup>

The use of the word ‘required’ in this context suggests that Segundo thought that it *ought* to be a condition of full membership. It is not difficult to imagine reactions in churches to such a requirement if the “initial proclamation” is taught, and perceived, in

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<sup>74</sup> p. 255.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, p. 255, 256.

the highly political terms identified by McCann and Hewitt. From Segundo's standpoint, of course, the problem of education is a formidable one, if the whole Church is to have a liberating role in society. In a Preface to a study by Arthur Hennelly of the theology of Segundo himself, the latter pursues the practical implications of that role.

By way of example, let us assume with Tillich that the specifically theological domain, the domain of understanding the faith, is situated in the realm of those things that have to do most deeply and profoundly with the meaning of our existence. Wouldn't the logical consequence be that "practical theologians" (quite different from theology professors in universities) have to learn the difficult analytical method: (1) of discovering these ultimate concerns in the people they ordinarily meet in life, even though these concerns are seldom mentioned directly and explicitly; and (2) of relating the data so uncovered to the content of faith? Wouldn't it be suicide to leave that to the intuitive capacities of individual candidates?<sup>76</sup>

The "practical theologians" will have to be part of the creative vanguard, of course. The difficulty of their task is obvious. If the masses in Segundo's own society, by his own account, are not inclined towards new ideas of religion, educating them could be a daunting task. Not making the effort could undermine the whole vanguard hope to transform society or confine that hope to a small, sectarian movement. Hennelly points to the dilemma and quotes from another work of Segundo.

On the other hand, the minority cannot achieve a social change of any consequence unless it brings the masses along with it in the process. Thus, the minority must create a "facilitating environment" or type of artificial environment to achieve its goals; in a word, it must develop *institutions* which "created by an active minority, are intended for the passive majority, in order to obtain from it the choice needed for its own good".<sup>77</sup>

The passive majority to which Segundo referred in 1964 was a Latin American one. In his assessment in 1979 of Segundo's theology, Hennelly pointed to the marked

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<sup>76</sup> *Theologies in Conflict: the Challenge of Juan Luis Segundo*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, p. xv, xvi.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, p. 77; the quotation from Segundo is in *La cristiandad, una utopia*, Montevideo: Mimeografic Luz, 1964, p. 61.

growth, primarily in North America after Vatican II, of lay movements seeking social justice and linked to the Roman Catholic Church. Segundo's faith in justice and liberation with a Christian basis provided a "much needed theoretical underpinning" for such activity as well as for a new evangelization in Latin America. Hennelly referred to the vision of the people of God, the evolutionary perspective of Teilhard de Chardin accepted at Vatican II and the statement of Jürgen Moltmann that the Church did not "have" a mission, but that "the mission of Christ creates its own church".<sup>78</sup>

In that wider context cited by Hennelly, Segundo's theology had many links. In Latin America at that time, however, as noted in the previous chapter, the mission of Christ as interpreted by the liberation movement still continued to face the problem of the religious passivity of many of the poor. The liberation leaders also found that the middle classes, powerful, pivotal and volatile, as Segundo knew well, had for the most part turned against military regimes but were more inclined to choose the market economy than the social projects sponsored by liberation theologians with their ideological orientation. A conservative reaction in Rome against the movement in the Church reinforced that trend in society. The liberation movement had achieved an initial momentum in 1968 within the Church. As Segundo pointed out, they benefitted from being part of the institution. They did not take it over. For that reason, Hennelly's adaptation of Moltmann's statement to the effect that "The Mission Has a Church" is misleading.<sup>79</sup>

The liberation ideas remain, as part of a relative pluralism of theologies, or tolerated diversity. The churches in Latin America have not become liberation missions. Segundo's education project cannot be directed only to masses still influenced by popular religion. The new hermeneutics as part of a modernization of thought about religion may

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<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, a chapter heading in Hennelly's book.

be acceptable to the middle classes, but that does not mean that the ideological orientation of the liberation movement will be accepted also.

### *The Segundian Model*

Where does all of this leave us with respect to a profile of a Church meeting the requirements of Segundo's understanding of the essence of the Christian message? The main points in the strategy for the Church in dealing with the political and cultural environment have been noted. To those can be added the following elements of a profile to be deduced from what has been reported about Segundo's views in the past two chapters.

(1) The Roman Catholic model, in structure and in basic governance, animated by the main tendencies of Vatican II, illuminated mostly by *Gaudium et Spes*, with ultimate authority modified by Tillich's Protestant principle, seems to be preferred.

(2) Social justice, with a communitarian emphasis, would have to be the principal focus of Church action in society. This would follow Hennelly's precept, reversing common wisdom, "the Mission has a Church". At the same time, the Church would not commit itself to an ideology, such as socialism, for all places and all times. Action, even violent action, if necessary, should be taken under the provocation of obvious injustice. At the same time, the Church cannot overlook the fact that some unjust structures and situations in society may still sustain a social fabric which should not be destroyed by violent means to serve an ideological cause.

(3) The sacraments and liturgies of Catholicism will be retained, not because they have all the powers attributed to them by orthodox teaching, but because they can serve as unifying factors supporting the communitarian mission.

(4) Segundo argued for doctrinal pluralism in the Church, in support of liberation theology, in his response to Cardinal Ratzinger. Presumably he would allow alternatives to liberation theology, and various hermeneutical systems, in a new community. Children

would require some simplified catechesis but adults would need systematic education by practical pastoral theologians in order to understand the purposes and directions of policy of the vanguard.

(5) What is understood to be popular religion in Latin America, combining superstition with political passivity, would have to be gradually eliminated with respect, however, for some elements of the wisdom of the people. As for other elements in society and in the Church the appeal of the vanguard would be to civilized self-interest and the compassion for others at the heart of the New Testament message (supported by secular scientific and ideological analysis, as required).

(6) For this reason, and others, Scripture would remain at the heart of teaching and liturgy. The healing, liberating and transcendent power of Jesus of Nazareth was the anchor of the faith which could be applied, along with the acquired wisdom of centuries of tradition, to the ideological and ecclesiastical means and ends of the day.

(7) Tillich's Protestant principle, accepted by Segundo, would seem to eliminate Papal infallibility. There is little indication that Segundo intended to alter the Catholic episcopal system of governance, in general. The authority of an imaginative and creative minority had to be maintained, even if this could lead to some dangers of centralization. A devolution of authority similar to some Protestant systems of organization did not seem to interest him, although his associate in liberation theology, Leonardo Boff, was thinking along these lines in his *Ecclesiogenesis*.

(8) We have noted Segundo's ecumenical spirit, expressed primarily in terms of a common cause for social justice but perhaps expressing a conviction about overcoming doctrinal barriers in converging lines of theology.

This review of the Segundian model points to underlying tension between concepts of a social mission shaping all dimensions of that Church and concepts of what Tillich saw as Spiritual Presence, or Catholic substance, here and now. To what extent Segundo considered that this tension produced a serious dilemma of choice it is hard to

say. Others have suggested a difficult problem of reconciling opposed concepts. In his analysis of the tensions between popular religion and liberation, Michael Candelaria points correctly, I think, to the dilemma.

For Segundo, it is vital to avoid the Scylla of “universal religion” that would entail, he fears, the loss of Christianity’s function as a sign of liberation and the Charybdis of a sect that leads to the same result. The key to avoiding such danger is changing our conception of the Church. The Church should no longer be considered as a society but as a *community*.<sup>80</sup>

There are other ways of describing the dilemmas of change as well as this one. They will be considered in the next chapter in which the political risks of trying to implement liberation, for an institution with an essentially cultural function, will be set alongside the risks which Candelaria points out of not being a sign at all in that sense.

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<sup>80</sup> *Popular Religion and Liberation; the Dilemma of Liberation Theology*, p. 95.

## Chapter Seven

### Political Risks, Contingencies and Philosophical Dilemmas; Institutions and Culture

In the Introduction in Chapter One I proposed that culture be considered as that dimension of society in which values and meaning were determined by the contributions of several interacting institutions. The Church, as the institutional representative of a religious community, belongs there. The representatives of other religions, the state in its claim to constitutional legitimacy and power and institutions representing the arts and education are other formative elements in that sphere. Tillich insisted, as we have noted, that religion provided the substance and meaning of culture. Culture, in turn, manifested the form of religion. Segundo stipulated that the Church should not be a “political agent” but also insisted that it should be a leaven of light and critical judgement in the world on highly political issues. The principles set forth by theologians almost seem to suggest an ultimately dominant role for the Church with respect to the political form of society and to the cultural sphere as defined above. Neither theologian, however, advocates the theocracy which that dominance implies.

Reconciling a role as a sign of political liberation with avoidance of political agency and balancing it with all the other meanings of religion being the substance of culture does pose many difficulties of which churches are only too well aware. Conceiving of the Church as a community to avoid either universal religion or political sectarianism (the interpretation of Segundo’s ideas suggested at the end of the last chapter) does not really help with difficult choices. In concluding our examination of models of the Church, and before trying to reach general conclusions about both the contributions of the two theologians, we might take note of some further considerations about missions, politics, contingencies and spiritual options.

### *Organisations, Missions, Politics*

Bearing in mind the proposal of A.J. Hennelly that the liberation theology of Juan Luis Segundo could be understood as an example of a conviction that “the mission has a church”, we should take account of what an American sociologist specializing in the field of the theory of organizations has recommended to churches about carrying out a sweeping reformation of society. Mady Thung denied that she had borrowed and adapted a phrase from a sociologist/theologian, “the precarious vision”, referring to Christian faith, when she wrote her analysis, *The Precarious Organization: Sociological Explorations of the Church’s Mission and Structure*.<sup>1</sup> Her basic argument is that while the Christian churches have a great deal of value to communicate to society, they are in many respects inept, unimaginative and poorly structured to do so and need a considerable amount of help from sociologists of organization to maintain efforts at renewal and reorganization which she sees as “the order of the day”.<sup>2</sup> While impressed by the potential societal power inherent in the content of Christian faith, she argues that “the operationalization of the Christian faith on the level of social and political ethics is a task that has been very much neglected in the past”.<sup>3</sup> Her particular project of designing a mission-oriented Church is an individual one but her references to the work of associates implies that this judgement about churches is a general one in that field.

Thung is not referring to social welfare projects sponsored by churches but to “operationalizing [...] ultimate ends”.<sup>4</sup> The aim is a “new type of church [...] a missionary church”.<sup>5</sup> The type in mind “differs from state churches, free churches, denominations

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<sup>1</sup> The Hague, Paris: Mouton and Co., 1976. The author was referring to Peter L. Berger, *The Precarious Vision*, New York: Anchor Books, 1961.

<sup>2</sup> *The Precarious Organization*, p.1.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 219.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 64.

and other existing types".<sup>6</sup> Since Thung's model is not one of the main subjects of this thesis we need not pursue her critique and prescriptions. The important point is that with respect to structure, personnel, control, motivation, authority, objectives, flow charts, systems planning and verification of achievements the model is one appropriate to large corporations and, to a limited extent, to some social movements. From this perspective, most churches are bound to be a source of despair to organizations specialists, even in the United States, where, in Tillich's view, churches were a good deal more active, efficient and highly motivated in doing good works in society than churches were in Europe.

Reading Thung's book persuaded me that it was important to conceive the Church as a unique institution in the cultural dimension of society shaping its structures and activities in accordance with its own perception of spiritual and prophetic demands. Segundo would not disagree with this in principle, but, in spite of disclaimers about direct involvement with political parties, it is not clear how his Community, committed to social justice and liberation, would pursue these objectives as an active agent. Corporate models from the north would be the least likely influence in view of his scathing comments about sociology from the north lacking any general sense of societal purpose, value or ethics.

The analysis offered by another American sociologist from a different perspective, one directly concerning the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America, partially disproves Segundo's complaints. Ivan Vallier, in *Catholicism, Social Control and Modernization in Latin America* points to processes of change within the institutional Roman Catholic Church before the liberation movement really got under way.

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 3

These observations suggest that communism, Pentecostalism, or their functional equivalent are of extraordinary importance for the long-range process of change and modernization in Latin America. That importance does not lie so much in their direct contribution, i.e., the role of communism in fostering social revolution or the role of the Pentecostals in producing Calvinist ascetics, but rather in the ways these value movements push the Church toward religious specialization, thus extricating it from secular involvements and traditional adaptive emphases.<sup>7</sup>

The phrase “secular involvements” should be understood as almost invariable support for the regime in power as a means of maintaining public order and support for wealthier classes as the most stable and satisfied element in society, in other words the conditions on which the liberation movement based its revolt. “Traditional adaptive emphases” were internal matters of concern to bishops and Rome, not positive reactions to processes of modernization or criticisms on matters of social justice. “Its competitive problem has consisted mainly in defending itself against political groups who claimed that its scope of involvement in society was too wide”.<sup>8</sup> As we noted in Chapter Two, Tillich thought that the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America was the most conservative branch of that communion.

Under the impact of competition with regard to evaluative and normative ideas (in the cultural sphere, as defined) secular activities, political affairs, “new social identities and solidarity bases” were freed from “the dominance of Catholic norms”. This loosening of traditional patterns of social control did not mean that society did not continue to receive “inputs from the religious sector” that could positively assist

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<sup>7</sup> Santa Cruz: University of California Press, 1970, pp. 151, 152. It should be added in answer to Segundo’s complaints, that the liberation movement and its social and political context were taken seriously in all dimensions by sociologists “from the north”, e.g. the Canadians, Thomas Bruneau and W.E.Hewitt and others from the United States, even if they maintained a professional discipline and refused to be evangelized by the movement. I think that Segundo’s criticism relates rather to an earlier period when there was not much “modernization” or even less “liberation” in the south in which to take an interest.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, p. 150

“progressive secular elites”.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, Vallier observed, “the emphasis I have given to religious competition, the industrial sector, and the political emergence of marginal groups indicates that the Church is not an independent advanced front for change but first a follower or responder”.<sup>10</sup>

Vallier published this analysis of processes of modernization in 1970, two years after the Episcopal Conference at Medellin already mentioned. It was these processes, considered “liberating”, which Segundo was referring to when he argued that there were really two theologies of liberation, or that there had been a shift from what he saw as a critical and effective modernization with a sound theological basis to a rather confused concept of a spontaneously emerging Church of the Poor with a ready-made theology of its own. Obviously the modernization described by Vallier and claimed by Segundo had made considerable advances when, at Medellin and then at the next Episcopal Conference at Puebla a decade later, about one third of the bishops indicated in one way or another that they would support a general movement of societal liberation. This general support on those occasions did not indicate that the full implications and consequences of the new theology guiding a movement had been fully understood or that it had received a firm commitment. The support did not necessarily indicate what would happen when a widespread conservative reaction to the pace of change began both in Rome and in Latin America. That reaction was related to Vatican II, to the Conferences in Latin America and to political developments in particular countries in that region.

Segundo’s criticism of the other stream in liberation thinking might seem to make him a conservative, and traditionalist. In view of what has been reported of his thinking neither label fits. Political realism in support of substantial change within the institution itself as a condition for effective influence on diverse centres of power capable of

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, p. 153

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*, p. 158

bringing about a more just society would be a better way of identifying him. Michael Candelaria has pointed to the dilemma, for Segundo, of avoiding, in his type of liberation advocacy, a model of universal religion, a reliable and static spiritual canopy for society as a whole and its opposite a political and religious sect secure in its own narrow concepts of salvation. The dilemma is that of choosing the right ways of transformation. In this search, Candelaria points out, Segundo was determined to do what he could to bring in a new era.

Segundo applauds the process of secularization because, in his opinion, it leads to concientization, i.e., the capacity to make choices from among the means and ends offered by institutions. Uprootage frees human beings from subjection to institutions and compels the masses to make free decisions. Popular religion, however, thrives on the opposite socio-historical fact of "rootage": "patriarchal customs, the Christianity of the people, everything depends on rootage—virtually ahistoric, jealously guarded by isolation and continuity of the same habits".<sup>11</sup>

This is indeed in the spirit of determined modernization and even more in the spirit of a vanguard not hesitant to risk consequences of "uprootage" in order to make the masses realize their own interests. Being open to secularization means being open to the ideological trends of the day. As we have seen, Segundo was very much aware of the uses to which ideologies could be put as means to ends: in causes acceptable to Christian faith. His realism about transforming the Church and creating a new Community led him on another occasion to wonder whether an institution claiming an original revealed authority could tolerate change which constituted, in effect, continuing revelation.

How capable is the Church of permanently living out the tension between the dynamic unity of faith on the one hand and the historical plurality of the ideologies to which faith gives rise on the other hand? Can the Church keep this revelatory process going without bursting into pieces, since it will take countless ideologies to make the faith a reality within history?<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Popular Religion and Liberation: the Dilemma of Liberation Theology*, p. 91. In the last few lines of this passage Candelaria is quoting from Segundo's *La Cristiandad, una Utopia?*, p. 8

<sup>12</sup> *The Liberation of Theology*, p. 125, 126.

The more optimistic liberation theologians propose a political mission with a firm Biblical basis, with the expectation apparently of linear progress along this line as the oppressed masses realize that God is with them...after all. In turning to the Bible they were engaged in “an unexpected and thoroughgoing reversal” of a “major retreat in Western theology from the use of the Bible in social and political matters”. This was pointed out by an author dealing with religion and politics elsewhere in the world. It is evident in the case of Tillich’s defence of religion in a new age.<sup>13</sup> There is difficulty, however, in placing too much reliance on the Bible, in spite of the possible evocative appeal of imagery and narratives at the level of popular religion. That was the level at which Segundo wanted to direct his educational effort. As noted in the previous chapter, modern exegesis may not be a reliable support for liberation mission and is, in any case, difficult to reconcile with contextual theology.<sup>14</sup>

Segundo was obviously less optimistic about the pursuit of the liberation mission amid the shifting contingencies of politics, ideological trends and events in time and place. He still adhered to his evolutionary approach and humanist christology, to reliance on the hermeneutical circle, to the ability of faith to summon up wisdom in a deuterolearning process in making decisions about ideologies and to an intuitive confidence in the eventual dynamic unity of that faith. His approach to faith and ideologies was rejected by traditionalists who argued that faith would not shape decisions about ideologies but that shifting ideologies would shape and erode an inherited faith. Critical theologians in Latin America and elsewhere, while not contesting the degree of injustice which required a Christian response, found a variety of dilemmas, shortcomings and errors in liberation theology generally, that of Segundo and of others, which can only be listed

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<sup>13</sup> Duncan B. Forrester, *Theology and Politics*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988, p.105.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Rowland and Mark Corner, *Liberating Exegesis: the Challenge of Liberation Theology to Biblical Studies*, p. 5.

very briefly. The fundamental dilemma arose not from content or objective but from a methodology distant from the mainstream of Catholic life and thought.<sup>15</sup>

“The differentiating line drawn in the New Testament between the church and the world becomes more and more blurred in liberation ecclesiology”.<sup>16</sup> The objective of permeating the culture with Christian values was correct but liberation theologians underestimated what the Church as it was could do in society by a critical, but not partisan approach to political issues.<sup>17</sup>

There was also a good deal of support expressed for liberation theology, particularly in its early phase, not only for the obvious political reasons in Latin America but also in North America and Europe where it corresponded to the rebellious spirits in many spheres in the 1960's. The expression of support did not necessarily carry with it a perception of the dilemmas of transition to a new model of the Church without fundamental disruption of the existing institution.

Segundo's view of liberation theology in 1983, made in “irony and sorrow”, that it was “more a repetitive apology for itself than a constructive theological discourse” was cited in Chapter Five (page 146) in the general review of the beginning of liberative awareness in Latin America and Segundo's part in it. In that same essay of 1983, he pointed to reasons for that judgement which are relevant to those dilemmas of transition. Liberation theologians had wasted efforts on describing social and political situations which sociologists, economists and political scientists “were already portraying with perfect exactitude”. They had, for the most part, not followed the original path of “serious theological reflection” about the actual impact of theological concepts on dehumanizing practices in order “to produce a liberative theology”.<sup>18</sup> By turning their

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<sup>15</sup> Dennis McCann, *Christian Realism and Liberation Theology*, p. 227.

<sup>16</sup> Emilio Nunez, *Liberation Theology*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1985, p. 273.

<sup>17</sup> Ricardo Planas, *Liberation Theology: the Political Expression of Religion*, Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1986, p. 223.

<sup>18</sup> *Signs of the Times: Theological Reflections*, p. 94.

attention rather with a populist emphasis to what they considered to be the faith practices of believers, they had unintentionally removed pressure on the Church to make any real change. "The Church need no longer radically question its theology, but only preach liberation, offer its services and power to the people, and lead them by the hand to the political options recognized by a paternalistic Church as being more representative of the popular interests".<sup>19</sup>

The accusation of paternalism invites the obvious rejoinder about the role for a vanguard envisaged by Segundo. He did, of course, represent an alternative in ecclesial polity to the increasingly conservative official position of the Church. It was in keeping with the basic aims of liberation theology but it was intended to be implemented by a transformed Church not hoped for by a populist movement. What Segundo did not do in the 1983 essay was to explain, and assess the significance of the choices faced by the Church leadership a few years before, not with respect to new theology, or other general aspects of modernization, but with respect to a volatile revolutionary situation in a small country, Nicaragua. This situation might be considered a classic example of a specific political contingency in which no consistent principle, or strategy, of Church polity was likely to produce satisfactory results, although each one of two tactics carried out in a short period of time presumably carried the hopes of the Church hierarchy for at least relative success.

#### *The Church and Political Contingencies*

The bishops of the Roman Catholic Church in Nicaragua in 1979 were faced with a revolutionary situation in the country and a potentially serious split within the Church with regard to that political situation and to ecclesiastical discipline. In 1978 at the Episcopal Conference in Puebla compromises had been achieved with respect to the

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<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 95.

language used to refer to the social role of the Church, liberation from oppression and the base communities. Although the divergent views to be reconciled were those of the Latin American bishops, the specific language and tone of the final documents had the approval of the Vatican. In Nicaragua by the end of 1978 an increasingly corrupt, repressive and authoritarian regime was confronted by widespread opposition among most sectors of the population. In earlier years Church leaders had had relatively amicable relations with that regime but had begun to take a prudent distance from it by the time of its overthrow in the summer of 1979. Within the Church generally among the local clergy and faithful members liberation thinking had made considerable inroads. Armed action against the Somoza regime began with an attack on a National Guard post by young men from a religious community.

A few months after the overthrow of Somoza, the Church took its first tactical position with regard to the new political situation. Although careful to stipulate certain conditions about their understanding of socialism the Catholic hierarchy surprised many Catholics in Nicaragua and elsewhere by the support given to the results of the revolution. The Church had nothing against “a model of a nationally planned economy”, supported “the participation of the worker in the product of his labor, the overcoming of economic alienation” and welcomed a “process of humanization”.<sup>20</sup> Although surprising in this immediate context of Latin American politics, the language of the pastoral letter did not, in my view, depart very far from the social teaching of the Church as it had evolved throughout the present century. The letter also took account of the compromise

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<sup>20</sup> From the text of the pastoral letter quoted in Manzar Foroohar, *The Catholic Church and Social Change in Nicaragua*, Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1989, p. 200. This book provides a full account of events and positions taken in Nicaragua as does the following one: P.J. Williams, *The Catholic Church in the Politics of Nicaragua and Costa Rica*, London, Macmillan, 1989. With respect to the general course of events involving the Roman Catholic Church, the liberation movement and politics in Latin America, the studies most directly relevant to the questions dealt with in this thesis are listed in the Bibliography.

reached at Puebla and the degree of support for liberation theology and for action against Somoza within the Church. Tactically, it was clearly important for the Church not to appear to be regretting the demise of the previous regime at a time when, according to all observers, there was a good deal of general enthusiasm and optimism about a new era.

That situation, and the tactical image and profile of the Church, did not last very long. On a number of issues which could easily have been foreseen, given the Marxist orientation of the Sandinista Party, middle class circles and the Church accused the new Government of attempts to brainwash the people with Marxist propaganda in educational policy. The political prospects which alarmed the Primate, Archbishop Obando y Bravo and most bishops were not economic ones but were associated with the participation in the Cabinet of four priests who had been leading members of the liberation movement within the Church (one became the Foreign Minister). It appeared that in the political dynamics of the new situation the ideological mix within the Government of Marxism and radical liberationism would give considerable impetus to the de facto creation of a "popular church" within the official Church. The Primate conferred with the Pope, John Paul II, in the latter's visit to Brazil, and from then on the Church took a position of open hostility to the regime. A decade later, the situation within the Church could be summed up as follows.

Although the division in the Nicaraguan Catholic Church has intensified tremendously since the triumph of the revolution, and the political lines have been drawn between the hierarchy and the progressive clergy, the organizational separation has not occurred yet and both sectors claim to belong to one institution, the Catholic Church.<sup>21</sup>

That was in 1989. The Church did not break apart. An election shortly after that brought a liberal/conservative government into power. Extensive interviews reported in

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<sup>21</sup> *The Catholic Church and Social Change in Nicaragua*, p. 211.

another study of religion and politics in Nicaragua indicated that, apart from clergy and church members firmly supporting the Sandinistas, there were a good many others within the Church who thought that the hierarchy had over-reacted politically to a radical regime.<sup>22</sup> This well-known case in the history of religion and politics is cited not in order to comment on the actual issues within the state or within the Church but to point out first that, from the perspective of the bishops, they were faced with a dilemma with regard to defining, or not defining, the position of the Church in a revolutionary situation. Secondly, they appear to have been concerned with the political image of the Church, and the wider implications of that image in Latin America, both in the first position taken and in the following one. The Church was not being persecuted, it had given the new regime credit for honourable intentions and a vague blessing for its economic policies. The issue of the four priests was a matter of internal Church discipline. If the bishops are to be accused of politicizing the image, or even “model”, of the Church for tactical reasons, then the liberation theologians have to face the same accusation because of their indiscriminate attack on capitalism. The political contingencies of a given situation were more important in determining the course of events described than any theological debate within the Church about the social role of the institution.

So much for a national situation with regional implications for the political image of the Church; it was not an image which provided a very happy model for either the “progressive” or the “orthodox” sides within the institution. To conclude the examination of some important considerations about organizations, missions and politics we might take note of one quite local and limited example of the way in which popular religions competed in one town. There were two popular religions. One was the popular religion which dismayed Segundo,superstitious, politically passive and traditional. The other was

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<sup>22</sup> *The Catholic Church in the Politics of Nicaragua and Costa Rica*, see appropriate chapters.

the popular religion denounced by Pope John Paul II in his visit to Nicaragua in 1983, that is the liberation movement as it had developed within the particular political circumstances of Nicaragua.

The study from which the following information and comments are extracted concerns the recent history of religion and politics in the town of Morro, in the province of Recife in Brazil. The main point made by the author is contained within the title: “the broken promise of liberation theology”.<sup>23</sup> The Bishop of Recife was one of the early heroes of the liberation movement, Dom Helder Camara. Beginning in the 1950’s there were developments within this region in Church and society, and in Brazil generally, which were part of the processes of modernization identified by Ivan Vallier in 1970. Segundo was certainly an active participant in these processes in Montevideo. Under the impetus of Vatican II, the Episcopal Conference in Medellin and the published appeals of the new liberation movement one of the priests assigned to a parish in Morro became a very active exponent and promoter of the new theological/political style.

A confrontation developed in the religious life of the town between the new style and the old one. The lines of allegiance were not defined by income, education or religious upbringing. The conflict revolved around a number of issues, ranging from an understanding of the purpose of the mass to the way in which a popular religious festival centred on a statue of the Virgin Mary was to be conducted. The political positions were incompatible. So far as the Church was concerned, the two parties advocated “opposite directions for the same institution”.<sup>24</sup> Another part of the title of this study, “claiming the Virgin” sums up the situation symbolically; which Virgin Mary, intercessor for the faithful in heaven or advocate for the inherently political message of the Magnificat?

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<sup>23</sup> Robin Nagle, *Claiming the Virgin: the Broken Promise of Liberation Theology in Brazil*, New York, London: Routledge, 1997.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p. 56.

The conflict ended with a victory, or apparent victory, for the traditionalists. The successor of Dom Helder Camara, in the conservative reaction to liberation theology, dismantled the liberation movement in the Church, in Morro and elsewhere. The base communities in the area achieved some kind of secular status and their members concentrated their energies on supporting the cause of the Labour Party. Their candidate did well in the first free election after the end of the military regime but did not win. Robin Nagle reached the following conclusion about the future of liberation movement.

It is possible to imagine a version of liberation theology that would not alienate as many people as it attracted, but the particular conditions in which it came to prominence did not foster a slowly developed set of rituals and doctrines that might, over time, replace older Latin American Catholic traditions. In fact, much of the practice of liberation theology stumbled because it did not allow room for vital and deeply held beliefs about how God, Jesus, Mary, and the Church were understood to work in people's lives.<sup>25</sup>

Nagle makes a valid point but the liberation movement in the Roman Catholic Church can hardly be regarded as a spent force. As in the case of the Nicaraguan events, neither reflective conservatives nor reflective progressives could take much comfort from the type of confrontation exemplified in Morro. The essential point made, surely, in Segundo's concept of the vanguard, and in his insistence that there was another type of liberation theology to set alongside the more apocalyptic vision of Gutierrez, was that theological modernization ("liberation of theology") and the social teaching of the Church had to mature in their own way. The social fabric should not be torn by ideology, even if faith would have difficult judgements to make about ideologies.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid*, p. 158

<sup>26</sup> Canadians familiar with their own history of religion and politics may well notice a certain parallel between the Latin American events described above and what happened, primarily in Western Canada, after the Winnipeg general strike of 1919. Labour supporters, including leading Methodists, formed a Labour Church which had a fairly short existence. The Methodists then returned to help found the new United Church which had to cope with its own tensions between a very Protestant commitment to individual freedom, economic or otherwise, and a very Protestant conscience about the social implications of the Gospel.

*Philosophy, Psychology, Art and the Church*

All the liberation theologians, including Segundo, can fairly be described, as already suggested, as evangelical radicals. Their model and political program for the Church, combined with literalism and selective political symbolism in Scriptural exegesis, certainly was intended to shock orthodoxy, and did so.

If there is one phrase which cannot be applied to Paul Tillich it is evangelical radical, certainly after he announced his retirement from politics in 1945, and, to a large extent, before that. What he did, in justifying religion and Christianity to the modern (i.e. Enlightenment) mind was to use philosophical means of achieving theological reductionism. He replaced a supernatural, trinitarian, providential God of traditional theism, supported by elaborate theologies about divine intentions in this world and beyond, with philosophical and psychological propositions, leading to conclusions of a religious type about a Ground of Being. He completed the structure of the case, eventually, by incorporating the Church as a Spiritual Community and the Christ-event in order to point to Jesus of Nazareth as the central, and only, example of ontological fulfilment. He was a theological radical administering as much of a shock to orthodox theology as the liberation movement did in its own context.

Two different kinds of shock occurred, however, and the theologians who produced them followed paths which not only crossed, but almost reversed, traditional confessional lines. Tillich's shock, for those who found his theology persuasive, was one of implosion. The supernatural structure and miraculous signs collapsed inwards, fairly gently because some of its major elements became symbols. A psychological and eschatological Ground was offered and two elements, Jesus and the Church, were held to have a more or less secure historical basis. Liberation theology's shock wave where it had immediate effect was an explosion outwards. It called on the Roman Catholic Church as it was, with all supernatural and temporal resources available in a powerful institution, to become the Church militant in the service of social justice. Tillich intended to abolish

literalism from exegesis. The liberation theologians made a great effort to use it in their own cause. Liberation theology carried to its logical conclusion and exemplified, perhaps, by the militant socialism of the four priests in Nicaragua, bears a real resemblance to the left-wing sectarian movements of sixteenth-century Protestantism. Tillich's whole body of work, wide personal interests and autobiography suggest to me rather a kind of cultural Catholicism as a model. Followers, putting strict theology aside, could feel at ease in a cathedral with all the resources of architecture, art, symbolism and the interpretation of symbols in liturgy to assure them of the continuity of elements in European and Western culture about which he apparently felt deeply. Priestly services in a traditional confessional would hardly fit, but counselling about anxieties in the ontological mode of "courage to be" would be appropriate. His sermons have apparently influenced more clergy in mainstream Christianity than his systematic theology.

Those who have rejected Tillich's theology in general, or basic elements in it, would probably agree that a model of "cultural Catholicism" is correct. A church which was shaped completely by it would become in effect a cultural institution simply embodying modern humanism with a shifting set of convictions, intuitions and experiences considered to have spiritual and ethical value. The Church has been referred to as an institution in the cultural sphere. A distinction has to be made between the use of these terms for essentially sociological purposes and the concept of cultural Catholicism. In the latter case we have an institution whose essential core resides somewhere in the realms of philosophy, psychology and art, whatever patron saints it may claim. If the distinction between a cultural sphere of values and meaning and a profane sphere of indispensable services and functions, neutral with regard to the other sphere, is accepted as reasonable as a means of categorization, then the most conservative of Christian churches belongs to that cultural sphere just as much as quasi-religions, ideologies, rationalist associations and, logically, cultural Catholicism, with whatever religious identity it wishes to claim.

The concluding question about Tillich then is whether the combination of a radical theological break and an emphasis on the philosophical, psychological and aesthetic elements (“culture” as the arts in a narrower sense) in his religious system is perceived to be a danger to the continuing faith, tradition and confidence of mainstream Christianity comparable to that posed by an untenable demand for political militancy. The general context for Tillich’s theology and specific reactions to it were provided in earlier chapters. There remain, however, some assessments from a massive amount of secondary literature, significant in indicating more general attitudes within churches, which can add to our perception of what a Tillichean church would be.

Both with regard to Tillich and to Segundo, of course, we have to keep in mind the warning from doctrinal and church history that theologies, like ideologies, come and go, are debated within churches without much discernible effect on the shape or behaviour of the institution and are treated selectively by church leaders and assemblies. Attempting to gain some idea of how two influential theologians would really like to see mainstream Christianity develop is part of the ecumenical effort to determine how new ideas could eventually find acceptance. It might also indicate whether diverse, but not mutually exclusive sets of ideas could be held for review without undermining what Segundo trusted as the dynamic unity of the faith.

The examination by academic specialists of the full implications of Tillich’s writings for the churches, or Church, continued, and continues. David Tracy in an essay on “Tillich and Contemporary Theology” reviewed one of the most difficult and controversial areas of the latter’s theories, that of correlation. It is described variously as philosophical and existential questions obtaining religious answers, or the encounter of the human and finite with the infinite and divine, through analogies. I approach this theory with considerable diffidence myself. For the more modest purposes of this analysis of models of the Church, and its survival in spite of conflicting theologies, I note

Tracy's conclusion that the Church probably will be able to survive both liberalism and neo-orthodoxy.

And the method of correlation, substantively, as Tillich actually employed it, can sometimes produce a remarkably liberal insistence upon identity or radical similarity. The same method at other times, produces a clearly neoorthodox insistence on radical confrontation.<sup>27</sup>

Tracy continues to analyze the "pluralistic strength" of Tillich's method which will permit continuing interactions between theological emphases within the Church.

Tillich's own pluralistic use of the method as well as the distinct usages of later theologians demonstrate the enduring vitality of an approach that need not become a school, a method that need not yield to methodologism, a hermeneutical position that exposes the naivete of orthodox theologies, a post-liberal and a post-neoorthodox position that allows the enduring hermeneutical achievements of both liberal and neoorthodox theologies to live a hermeneutically transforming existence even now.<sup>28</sup>

I do not think I could explain each of these assertions, step by step. What does strike me is that Tracy's conclusions probably represent the resolution, for him, of a dilemma within a very abstract, but very important part of thinking within the Church. Compared to this theological dilemma, the choices for the bishops in Nicaragua with regard to the image of the Church facing the Sandinistas, or the choices for the Vatican in dealing with a militant political theology, were simple. Put simply, indeed simplistically, the dilemma is that of holding to the analyses of reality characterizing modern thought while protecting the unique nature of a religious revelation. Whatever may be judged of the results in Tillich's case, surely this was his intention.

So far as issues of the Church and ideologies are concerned, a comparatively recent (1994) examination of Tillich's political position in the 1920's by Jean Richard makes another point closer to the dilemma posed by liberation theology.

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<sup>27</sup> in James Luther Adams, Wilhelm Pauck, R.L. Shinn, eds., *The Thought of Paul Tillich*, p. 265.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

In the revised edition of his report to the consistorium, he goes further in the matter. Representatives of the Church who stand on socialist ground should not be prevented from entering the socialist movement. In the same way, no one should be turned aside from leadership in the Church because of his socialist ideas. Of course, this will create conflict within the Church, but, contrary to the sect, the Church can withstand such tension. Thus the Christian socialist movement will have a positive effect upon the Church. Otherwise, the Church will have no right to be called "Church of the People".<sup>29</sup>

This position is close to, if not identical with, the intention attributed to Segundo by Michael Candelaria of steering a course between a Church concerned only with mass membership and minimum obligation and, at the other extreme, a sect concerned only with its own immediate perception of truth and virtue.

The perceptions of resolutions of dilemmas by Tracy and Richard with regard to Tillich's theology must be balanced against the warnings by others that Tillich's fundamental conclusions do not resolve but increase dilemmas for the Church. I will refer only to some comments, without attributions, indicating the nature of the warnings. It is impossible in this study to do justice to the massive amount of commentary on one aspect or another of what Tillich wrote. Tillich himself admitted ambiguities often in his own sweeping concepts. There is also a good deal of ambiguity in commentary as to whether warnings mean general rejections of the theology.

A basic warning, expressed in various ways, has been that writing about a Supreme Being and about Jesus as the Christ in terms of symbolism raises serious doubts about Tillich's theism and Christianity. He insists on the necessity of sacramentality and ritual symbolism in general but did not appear to find any particular sacrament necessary. (At this point, I interject my own comment about cultural Catholicism). There was no real bridge between a philosophical concept of an eternal divine and human essence and the actual historical existence of Jesus. Although he had recognized the weaknesses in

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<sup>29</sup> "The Socialist Tillich and Liberation Theology" in Raymond F. Bulman, Frederick J. Parrella, *Paul Tillich, a New Catholic Assessment*, p. 153.

Protestantism with regard to sacramentality and ecclesiology, the picture he presented of Roman Catholicism was distorted and unfair. At times Tillich's doctrine of the Church is diffused into a general theory of religion as a response to the unconditional. His concept of God leaves us with mystery rather than with revelation and so falls far short of Christian belief about truth. God does not appear as the supernatural creator, ruler and redeemer. What Tillich offered was a philosophical system, not the Gospel.

These were the principal elements of rejection or warning. They point to the obvious fact that whatever lasting influence his theology may have in Christian churches he did not achieve a synthesis of doctrines throughout these churches. In his case, as in that of Segundo, however, the influence may be found not only in arguments accepted but also in the effort they provoked to find answers to new questions.

## Chapter Eight

### Conclusions

The previous chapters about Paul Tillich and Juan Luis Segundo have emphasized what are mostly quite separate contexts and theologies. This has been done in order to point to examples of two different and major strands in theological formulation in this century, with their implications for concepts of the Church and its relations with its cultural environment. Some of the implications have been noted in those chapters. In the immediately preceding chapter about basic dilemmas and the contingencies affecting change in the Church, comments in the first part about risks in a political role referred primarily to Segundo. Comments in the second part about the dangers of a philosophical and spiritual diffusion which would erode the impact of the Christian message referred primarily to Tillich.

In this review of conclusions which might be drawn from preceding chapters about models of the Church, the emphasis will lie mostly on the linking contributions made by both to changing concepts in the six areas listed in the Introduction. These were the following: interactions with secular culture; the modification of traditional doctrines; the risks and benefits of unsettling change; ecumenical convergence; the basis of authority within the churches; the Church as the indispensable bearer of a prophetic message about the Kingdom of God.

Other considerations about the nature of this project must be kept in mind. It is the concept, or vision, of the Church held by two individuals with which we are concerned. No attempt is made to suggest the degree of probability of change in any of these areas in the churches as they are; the limiting contingencies are obvious. At the same time, the project began with two pre-suppositions. One was that the extent of the influence exerted by these two bodies of ideas has been or is likely to be significant

enough to justify the present research and analysis as a contribution to an understanding of the directions of change within the churches. The other pre-supposition was that Tillich and Segundo were not only advocating directions of change, but were, intentionally or not, pointing to changes in thinking already under way. They were obviously not the only ones involved in these processes. The differences in scale of the theological systems put forward by Tillich and Segundo are considerable. In each case, however, a broad synthesis of ideas about ecclesial polity is proposed as a desirable consensus for that polity.

The conclusions which will be listed under the six headings indicated are based on the evidence presented in the relevant chapters. The selection of relatively brief excerpts and comments on implications for the Church in general are, unavoidably, part of a process of interpretation on my part. The attempt is made, nevertheless, to present as accurately as possible the most clearly expressed indications of what the two theologians most hoped for in the Church.

After conclusions of that nature I will offer my own assessment of the importance of these possible changes in relation to the contemporary dilemmas of choice mentioned in the Introduction. The examples given there, partly to define what I mean by dilemma, are closely related to the areas of possible change, but are not quite the same. The final conclusion about radical defences will then be explained.

### *Secularization*

Each theologian opened doors in his own thinking and, in presenting theological propositions, to influences from outside the Church and its inherited doctrines. Tillich spoke of autonomous culture and his hope for a theonomous bridge between it and the Sacred Community within the Church. He drew as much on modern philosophies and pivotal intellectual developments in a number of fields outside any formal religious framework as he did on the philosophies, theologies and mystical intuitions influencing

Christianity from its Judaic and Hellenistic origins. He did so in making his case that the Church could only benefit from a re-assessment of the particular forms of dogmatic theism to which it had been committed for some time. Segundo welcomed processes of intellectual secularization and the challenge of ideologies as possible means to just ends which could still be judged by the Church from its own faith and experience.

In each case, also, the theologian accepted the impact of the secular world in a carefully selective way. The critique of that world was as carefully developed as the one directed towards the Church. Tillich turned against all the elements in modernity which he considered to be spiritually banal and dangerous to the richness of his own culture. Segundo turned against the central elements in modernity represented by industrialization and the market economy, not on theoretical grounds about long-term benefits or disadvantages of this or any other system, but because the actual consequences in particular places were unacceptable to his sense of justice and compassion derived from Scriptural roots.

Tillich and Segundo viewed their own immediate cultural environments differently. Tillich made a good deal of the possibilities of support for the basic message and objectives of the Church to be found in theonomous culture, an invisible or latent Spiritual Community. Segundo, while open to dialogue with anyone outside the Church, considered such a possibility as skeptically as he did the hopes for the mystical emergence of a new Church from the ranks of the poorest elements in society.

In Tillich's system religion and culture at first seem to be one reality, with two dimensions. This assertion is then carefully modified by carefully drawn lines of distinction, so far as specific questions about Church and society are concerned. The two are often in opposition. Each has, at times, a guilty conscience about the other. In the end Tillich's idea of synthesis, of a complex relationship of silent interpenetration, critical judgement and political establishment (for the Church!) becomes a relationship in which the Church receives the wisdom of the world, but transforms it. This position is not very

far away from traditional ones in Christian thinking. What does the Church offer to the skeptical intellectuals who are distant from that kind of thinking? It offers at least spiritual truth about the human situation, expressed symbolically, which they could understand. What about the secular world of politics? The Church maintains a reservation about its specific role but insists on its obligation to initiate, motivate and judge all social processes relevant to its faith in the Kingdom of God.

Readers of the works of Tillich who may have wondered whether his advice to the Church was to be absorbed within, or to emulate secular culture, will probably conclude, as I have, that when his comprehensive system was fully explained, he ended up on the Church side of a carefully delineated boundary.

Segundo has not judged it necessary to engage in grand philosophical analyses in order to make the points which have concerned him most about social injustice and political stupidity around him. Although he has maintained his distance from others in the liberation movement he is, like them, an evangelical radical with attention focussed on what can be done to bring about some parts of the Kingdom of God. We might place him on the politically radical edge, in a Latin American setting, of those who had promoted change at the Vatican II Council. He considered academic associates in the human sciences to be allies in his cause. Religious faith is a prolongation of anthropological faith. Human values can be accepted and then recognized as sacred or absolute. On the other hand far too much secular culture had been absorbed by the Church in the past, in the form of the political perspectives of emperors, kings and feudal barons and of the economic perspectives of the wealthy classes.

With regard to what might be perceived as the menace of secularization the advice of the two theologians to the Church seems to be quite straightforward. Do not be too concerned. Take what, after due consideration, seems wise to you and have confidence in your own resources for judging the ways of the world.

### *Fides quae Creditur*

The writings of Tillich and of Segundo as a whole certainly suggest that foundational creeds of the early centuries, confessional statements and theological positions adhered to by leaders of the churches would have to be changed a good deal to incorporate fully the convictions, perceptions and visions of two revisionist theologians. Neither body of writings, however, has contained an alternative formal set of creeds. The churches are presumably to be left for some time to come to engage in continuing fresh interpretation, reflection on experience, ecumenical discussion and dialogue with secular culture. They will then have to face up to the possibility of supplementing, if not replacing creeds, in order better to define a foundational event and their own religious identity in the world.

Beyond this general observation about the implications of these writings for the Church as it is (or the churches as they are), we have to note quite different positions taken by Tillich and by Segundo. While disclaiming any intention of providing a *Summa* or a *Dogmatics*, Tillich did complete a systematic theological synthesis to guide thinking in the Church about its nature and mission. It was, in his view, apparently more a basis for discussion and mediation among contending interpretations than a creed which had to be accepted. He objected to having unconditional subjection to inherited creeds made a condition for membership in the Church. By leaving a good many questions about the content and requirements of belief open, he was being consistent with regard to these basic intentions. The emphasis in his system on deliteralization, symbolic understanding of earlier creeds, narratives or events, and on the availability of answers from an unconditional and divine realm of being to the most pressing existential questions (his theory of correlation) tended to leave the individual member of the Church with a good deal of freedom to reach his or her own conclusions about any fixed structure of belief.

Segundo has spoken of dogmatic encumbrances, elements of traditional belief not really valid even at the beginning, and the need to liberate theology and dogma from

concepts of a fixed deposit of revelation. The structures of belief he has said were made by members of the Church to begin with and can be thought through again in a continuing pedagogical process. A certain amount of relativism about belief, embodied, or at least implied in what he has said about a hierarchy of truths, offers openings for new interpretations. Having made all these points about liberation from complete dependence on inherited dogma, however, he does not follow Tillich or European and North American liberals in any more radical tampering with supernatural concepts or revelations. Questioning the divinity of Christ or the role of divine Providence with regard to the Exodus would reduce, at least, the evangelical force of the summons to liberation here and now. This last comment is, of course, my own. It is, perhaps, unfair to Segundo.

### *Risk of Change*

The attitude of both theologians to doubts among Church members about the risks of change in an institution considered reliable because it is assumed to be immutable has, for the most part, been indicated in the preceding sections about secularization and creeds. Something more should be added since fear, either of unsettling change or of a stationary position in which stronger forces in society have the initiative seems to constitute one of the dilemmas in religious life.

In proposing a revised approach to religious truth and to a new understanding of Christian revelation, Tillich admitted that there were risks in taking leave of familiar hierarchies in belief. He advocated courage not only for individuals with regard to fundamental anxieties in life, but a collective courage in overcoming a conservative conformism which was spiritually deadening. The prophetic spirit from the beginning was one which was committed to the risks involved in criticizing older understandings and demanding change. The controversy which erupted in Britain when Bishop John Robinson published his book *Honest to God* had, in Tillich's view, forced Church leaders

and wider circles of Church members to take seriously theological trends well under way in Europe.

Segundo, in some of his comments on the risks of doing something new, sounded more venturesome than Tillich. The religious commitment of one life required a wager, since the truth and full meaning of the path chosen could not be tested beforehand. Segundo admitted that the costs of taking steps down some ideological path as a means to a good end -- even revolutionary steps -- could not be measured. That consideration should not deter Christians from taking actions which their religious judgement and intuition, in the light of Scriptural precedents, required them to consider. He was determined to shake the Church out of what he saw as a spiritual paralysis. This meant pushing people (first of all the clergy) into complex challenges and the anxieties even of an effort at liberation.

#### *Ecumenical Convergence*

Segundo's assertion that the liberation movement was a profoundly ecumenical one has been noted. Apart from the obvious consideration that allies in support of the liberation cause would be welcome, there are some wider dimensions to his assertion which lend support to the idea that in the long run the two theologies with which we are concerned imply an ecumenical convergence. Collaboration for particular social and political objectives could teach participants from various churches something new about the religious bases in each case for such action. The principle of hierarchy of truths, which Segundo saw as a very important part of an effort at authentic evangelization in Latin America, had in his view important ecumenical implications in helping churches to overcome fixed and long-standing confessional positions. Returning to Biblical sources for guidance on social righteousness in the process of conscientization in the base communities also suggested the possibility of fresh ideas about common understanding.

Segundo's agreement with Tillich's insistence on the Protestant principle rejecting an inherent divinity and absolute authority in Church or Scripture, completes these various indications of an ecumenical spirit and expectation on Segundo's part, even if the implementation of that principle in practice might have been understood somewhat differently in each case.

Tillich was fully in sympathy with the ecumenical movement which got under way in his lifetime, even if he remained on the sidelines of the effort. He was also skeptical about prospects for empirical, institutional and universal union in the foreseeable future, given what he perceived about incompatible theologies, liturgies and cultural bases for existing church positions. On the positive side, his whole theological effort at redefinition of terms contributed substantially to the erosion of fixed models of what Protestantism and Catholicism should mean. He sketched a possible intellectual architecture for a new model of a Christian Church. The very scope and ambition of an even wider effort to erect a sacred canopy, not only over Christian churches but over a theonomous culture, made his system remote from the efforts in the World Council of Churches to deal with the immediate implications of their proclaimed ecumenical intentions.

#### *Authority in the Church*

The difficulties foreseen by Tillich with respect to any hope of institutional union of the churches are nowhere more apparent than in the question of the exercise of ultimate authority even within a new model of the Church. The Protestant principle as he defined it would seem to be fundamentally incompatible with any formal definition of, or defence of, the ultimate authority of infallibility within the Roman Catholic Church. Segundo thought that this formidable impediment to ecumenical progress had been largely overcome at Vatican II. Tillich died before he could properly assess developments at the Council meeting in this and in other respects. Although contesting the right of the

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to declare its theological system superior to any other in its Church, Segundo has worked within the structures of authority of the same Church. Tillich seemed to trust the Spiritual Community within the Church to hold the ultimate spiritual authority. He did not contest the responsibility of the ecclesiastical establishment in the institution to exercise the powers of traditional governance.

If we set aside the question of ultimate authority, then concepts of a firm, systematic and purposeful exercise of the powers of governance in the institution seem to me to be quite close in the two theologies. Tillich emphasized the importance of structure and system, it seems, both for theology and institutions. He wanted the Church to be, in effect, a political establishment (not “establishment” in the Church of England sense) which could maintain its position in society and culture independent of the state. This assumes that the institution is under fairly firm control by a vigilant leadership. Tillich understood and had considerable respect for the difficult role of the clergy. He thought that adult members of the Church needed something much better than the traditional Sunday School education as a basis for understanding their commitment and inheritance. The emphasis in his theology on individual religious experience and the role given to the Spiritual Community suggest also that the laity would have as much influence in shaping ecclesial polity as the clergy.

The parallels in Segundo’s views of the Church are clear. An educated and energetic vanguard, working within the traditional institution and following the directions indicated in well-articulated theological systems, is the indispensable element in a Church which aspires to be a leaven of light and judgement for the world. Education of the laity, even perhaps as a formal requirement of membership, also seems to be an important element. In view of his writings about liberation of dogma and his defence of theological pluralism we have to assume that Segundo does not expect the vanguard to choose one theological system and make dogma out of it. I have, therefore, referred to “systems”. This does not downgrade the theological element but suggests that flexibility

with regard to theological criteria and the implications to be drawn from them for action and belief within the Church are desirable. Counterbalancing forces against possible authoritarian attitudes in the vanguard would be found in the continuing role of the base communities, in the presence of a properly educated laity and in the questions and challenges from secular culture. Since the liberation movement had achieved, probably to its surprise, a significant impact at conferences of Latin American bishops, Segundo seems to be committed to the episcopal system and to working within the Church as it is. He does not have any more illusions about the religious and political influence of sects than Tillich had.

### *The Church and the Kingdom of God*

Of the six areas in which some conclusions may be drawn from these theologies about the shape of an emerging Church the two most important ones are the first, called Secularization, and the present one. Both concern the Church living and acting in the world as it is, but with a sense of potentiality and purpose which, for Christians, can be called eschatological. The other areas have to do, primarily, with the internal affairs of the Church.

The Kingdom of God, for the purposes of this summary and comment, has to be understood in two ways. One way, perhaps the most familiar one in contemporary discussion, requires collective social and political action, to bring about in world affairs even a fragmentary approximation of what, defined metaphorically, is the Kingdom of Heaven. The other way focusses on the way individuals live, by themselves or with others. The sphere is existential. Individuals need a sense of potentiality and purpose in their own immediate context as much as societies do.

The reason for emphasizing these two aspects of the Kingdom of God should be apparent from the account given of the thinking of the two theologians. If we understood the Kingdom in primarily political terms then we would have to say that Tillich, in the

latter part of his career, had lost interest in it. As a judgement on Tillich that would be absurd. If we understood the Kingdom primarily in terms of individual existence, then we would have to ask whether Segundo had forgotten about Heaven and had, in his political zeal, embarked on a course of purely secular liberation. That judgement would be unfair to Segundo since it would ignore the religious basis for the motivation, judgement and energy of the vanguard in its political action. For him living courageously also meant acting courageously on behalf of others.

From the perspective of these two fundamental aspects of the life and actions of the Church have Tillich and Segundo proposed anything very new about the model of the institution and its obligations in both respects? Another way of putting this question is to ask whether, given the judgements they have made about the human situation, they consider the Church itself to be essential, even very important, in dealing with the most pressing of human problems.

The answer to the first question has to be that not much has been said or could be said that is new on a subject which has engaged the attention of imaginative and conscientious minds for centuries. On the other hand, the actual experience of the Church at critical moments in any of these centuries adds to what Segundo said was the ability to learn. For that reason recalling some points from what Tillich and Segundo observed and reflected upon is worth doing.

The second question might be considered pointless since both authors wrote theology more or less from within the institution, even if critical on many points with regard to its actual performance. The question is not quite pointless, however. Given those aspects of the human situation which concerned them most they could have abandoned the Church and sought a different career, or engaged in direct action outside it. Tillich could very likely have had a distinguished career as an academic philosopher of existentialism with no more than a diffuse and philosophical religiosity. Instead, he wrote theology for the guidance of the Church until he died. Segundo might have joined a

guerilla movement as a number of Church people did. Instead, he told the guerilla chieftains, on the basis of the experience and perception of the Church, to put down their arms because they were ruining their own cause. In other words, theological critique of the Church presupposes a concept of what it ought to be and a determination to shape it in that direction. The concept is defended because of the conviction that the reality has substance, is unique in its function, and can be influenced.

What might be recalled, or repeated, from what has already been said about the experience of Tillich with regard to the Church and its obligations as the bearer of the Christian message? He told friends that his *Socialist Decision* was the work of which he was most proud. Ironically, the book, its purpose and its immediate political and cultural environment, remind us of one of the greatest failures in the communication of the particular Christian message which Tillich espoused. The churches in Germany, particularly the Evangelical Lutheran Church had, in Tillich's judgement, lost effective contact not only with the working classes but with society in general, to the extent that the barbarism of the National Socialists could not be stopped. The Social Democrats to whom Tillich addressed his appeal about religious roots were not necessarily opposed to it, although apparently mostly indifferent to it. By the time opposing forces, including sectors in the churches and theologians, such as Karl Barth and Paul Tillich, tried to rally the German people against the Nazi program, the effort was too late. Tillich had learned about the full force of the demonries of the present. He lamented the weakness of a Church which had failed to maintain effective contact with its own culture, both in listening and influencing in return. He observed the great difficulty for churches in taking political action in some circumstances if they could not rally support within their own political culture. That support could be acquired only by sustained effort over a long period of time. In turning away from any direct political orientation in the United States, as we have noted, he said that he had not changed his thinking about the relationship between religion and politics. This is partly puzzling but on the whole reasonable and

consistent as an explanation. He had identified himself politically with the Social Democrats in Germany but had wanted to provide them with a firm religious base in their thinking and, if possible, the support of the Church. In the United States he was identified, as has been suggested, with liberal democracy. He had also expressed admiration for social activism by American Christians. He hoped, however, to contribute to the development of a sound theological base for a good cause. In spite of what he said from time to time about the empirical Church, it was the only institution in which he could focus that task, although he attracted attention in wider circles. In that sense also he was being consistent about what should happen between Church and culture.

Since a number of points about Segundo's view of the Church and its interactions with society, particularly on political matters, have been listed in other chapters or in other areas examined in this chapter, there is no point in repeating them. What has to be stressed in conclusion about the Church and the Kingdom of God is that Segundo believes that the Church has a central, unique and functional role in human history. It offers a means of overcoming the alienation which some powerful social forces create among the people which they dominate. Its role can overlap with that of ideologies and it can choose to accept an ideological analysis or to ally itself with sponsors of a political course of action in particular circumstances. It should not become captive to any ideology, however, since it has its own role as spiritual and ethical judge of political action and social injustice.

Segundo rejects the argument of conservatives in the Church that politics lies in a profane sphere of human affairs into which the Church should not enter. He rejected other conservative arguments that dogmatic teaching on the social role of the Church could not be criticized or re-interpreted. If the Church had nothing to say about the confrontation between capitalism and socialism, a real *crux theologica*, then the gospel meant nothing.

These points about Segundo's concept of the role of the Church in history answer the second question about the importance of the Church quite emphatically. Did he add anything new about the model of the institution? The answer depends on whether we are thinking of the immediate context of his Church in Latin America or of the wider picture among Christian Churches globally. In that immediate context he and other initiators of the liberation movement were innovators who found a sympathetic response even at the episcopal level. In the wider context the concepts of the mission of the Church which he advanced were close to that of social gospel among Protestants. They did not, in my view, go much beyond the new teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* in the Roman Catholic Church which gave heart to the whole liberation movement. The Vatican II project in the eyes of its initiators was surely intended to debate, outline and project a new model of the Church. Segundo and others took this project seriously.

#### *Contemporary Dilemmas and Radical Defences*

The conclusions about the Church in six critical areas relevant particularly to its role in society are based on my understanding of the writings of Paul Tillich and of Juan Luis Segundo, assisted by the commentaries of others. They indicate, if not exactly models in a comprehensive sense for the functioning of an institution, at least the strong convictions emerging from two influential streams of theology about how Christian churches should view their situation in an increasingly secularized society, and about the contribution which they can make to that society.

When we stand back from the specific theologies of these two individuals and their advocacy of policy to be followed by Church leaders, the following conclusions might be drawn about the nature and effect of such advocacy on the churches with regard to the contemporary dilemmas to which I have referred. At this point the conclusions are mine, not to be attributed in any direct way to Tillich and Segundo but assisted by studies of Church and society of which examples are provided in the Bibliography.

There is a contrast almost paradoxical in nature between the vigour of the attacks mounted by both theologians on mainstream Christianity, its formal creeds, current realities and past performance *and*, as against this, the surprising confidence shown that the faith, a good part of the belief and the institution itself can be maintained and regenerated without really dramatic change. The changes advocated in shape and direction, as outlined above, are significant but not dramatic and are in some parts of the Christian world already under way. We should, of course, consider giving credit, to an extent still impossible to measure, to Tillich first chronologically and then to Segundo and the other liberation theologians for these changes.

Nevertheless, the contrast remains. Tillich referred to miserable reality, dogmatic absurdities and a superworld of inherited belief which no properly educated person could accept. Segundo has argued that the Church in Latin America has failed to achieve evangelization with authentic Christianity. In the logic of the secular and modern world we might have expected both theologians, as suggested in comments under *The Church and the Kingdom of God*, to find better systems, structures, institutions or organizations to fulfill their aspirations for humanity. The fact that they have not done so can only be attributed to two considerations. The first is that they encountered some form of religious revelation going beyond anything apparent from theology itself. The second is the more rational, but equally important one that they did not find any other institution likely to try to do all that they had in mind (in spite of considerable respect in both cases for the institutions and wisdom of the secular world).

There is another way of looking at the paradox, or near-paradox I have suggested. These theologians propose to alter the theological and creedal superstructure of the institution which their conservative opponents argue, with some justice, created and defined the Church in the first place following an act of revelation. The revisionists still trust that the organic power of continuity of the Church will enable it to go on as the bearer of a message which can be defined, and re-defined from time to time in the

manner of all purely human institutions. The contrast lies between the impact on what has been a defining superstructure (I used the analogy of implosion and explosion) and the mostly rational and pragmatic adaptation of the institution to changing cultural environments and political contingencies.

It has been the nature of these contrasts that has led me to suggest that the theologies in question, and the changing models of the Church which emerge from them, constitute radical defences of Christianity and the Church, relevant to the doubts, dilemmas and failure of confidence on the part of many of its members in a modern cultural environment. It is radical in both senses in which the word is used. Both Tillich and Segundo have appealed to origins and roots in challenging the creedal and theological superstructure in a way more revolutionary than reformist. At the same time they have defended the Church as a Spiritual Community, not only an empirical phenomenon in history, committed to belief in a Kingdom of God as both reality and potentiality in the full sense to which reference has been made.

The other aspects of the model, or models as outlined confirm the positive nature of the defence, either as directed towards the world outside or towards the members within as encouragement to persist in faith. Relations with the secular world are put into a new perspective. Secularization is presented not as an almost inevitable aspect of modernity, erosive in its effect on religious faith, but as a balanced process of interaction with other institutions shaping culture, in which it is possible to identify common causes to support and injustices and demonries to attack. Radical questioning about inherited creedal and confessional positions of the churches, and the labels attached to them, opens up a new and open space for ecumenical definitions of the nature of the Church and its role in human affairs. Reflection on the contemporary experience of the Church with regard to influence on political affairs provides both confirmation of traditional caution and new understanding of a position defined as one of reservation and obligation. Finally, whether one thinks in terms of Tillich's approach to the situation in the Church, or

Segundo's, the warning and advice to members are very much the same. They should not see themselves as passive recipients of instruction, admonition and salvation but as educated participants in shaping the life and tasks of the Church.

For the observers and analysts of world religions, from a secular standpoint in identifying important cultural phenomena in the shaping of societies, how can these particular ideas and developments within Christianity and its institutions be assessed? We might consider the philosophical judgements about religion expressed in the quotations presented as a preface to the thesis. The analysts could take counsel only from the process philosopher, A. N. Whitehead, who said in 1933 that "the history of religion is the history of the countless generations required for interest to attach itself to profound ideas". They would probably decide to leave it to future generations to detect clear evidence that the institution was no longer the same, because its ideas about itself had, at some point, changed.

They might better be guided by the assessment made by Paul Tillich in 1958, also in that preface, which is not confined to Christianity.

Religious traditions are the most conservative of all traditions, but below the surface the changes are very profound. It is as if the dynamic structure of the religious life of mankind has changed under the skin.

Finding evidence of significant change under the skin of religious institutions does pose difficulties since those in charge, for obvious reasons, want to maintain a general image of reliable continuity.

There is nothing subterranean, however, about the theologies we have examined. The social sciences have provided a good deal of documentation about the current decline in the fortunes of the churches, the *malaise*, discontents, dilemmas and doubts which have reduced considerably the strength of the institutions. It does take time, of course, as Whitehead points out, for new ideas to work their way through the system. The clergy and educated laity have to understand them first and to be persuaded of their

validity. These persons then have to attain sufficient power and influence to begin to implement them. They have to try them out cautiously on the membership as a whole and then deal with the problems raised by controversies between those who refuse any substantial change and those who want too much change too soon. Churches are not only religious institutions in particular cultural settings. They are also, with respect to these considerations, very political institutions also.

The contemporary dilemmas which Tillich and Segundo have addressed concern belief, spirituality, action in society, ethics, existential anxiety and guilt. None, fundamentally, are new in Christian thought, but their particular focus and form come from contemporary culture. The two theologians have taken that culture fully into account in attempting to influence the leaders of churches, and the general membership, without undermining the viability of what they consider to be an indispensable institution.

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### Section A: Works by Paul Tillich

### Section B: Works about Tillich

### Section C: Works by Juan Luis Segundo

### Section D: Works about the Liberation Movement and about Segundo

### Section E: Church and Society

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