I

I should first say a word about the background of this paper. Its appearance in the Conference programme is in some measure the acknowledgement of a debt. There was a time in my life when Tillich's writing was very important to me and some of the things he said helped me towards a clearer understanding of my own position as a somewhat uncertain Christian believer. When I heard that this conference was being convened only two days after the centenary of Paul Tillich's birth I thought I could not let the occasion go entirely unnoticed. I therefore set out to put together this account of the theme of salvation in Tillich's theological system.

II

The systematic principle which Tillich uses in his theology he describes as a method of correlating questions implied in human existence with answers which are given in the Christian message of revelation. In fact I think the use of the words 'question' and 'answer' can be misleading here since it can suggest a rational cognitive exercise which lacks the full personal and existential dimensions of what Tillich seems to have in mind. It would, perhaps, be better not to speak of answering questions but rather of giving a way of resolving or, one might say, of transcending dilemmas which are basic to human existence.

One more thing should be said about this correlation process before proceeding to our salvation theme. In the process of correlation Tillich recognizes that his focussing of 'questions' Is already shaped by the 'answer' with which the question is to be correlated. This seems to suggest a three-fold process. First there will be an analysis of the human predicament, then there will be a focussing of this predicament in terms
already shaped by theological convictions and then finally there will be the promise of an overcoming of this predicament drawn from the Christian gospel itself.

One of the basic dilemmas of human existence, perhaps the most basic of all, is represented in the fall of humanity which finds its first expression in the story of Adam and Eve. It is this notion which sets the stage for Tillich's doctrine of salvation. There is, Tillich believes, a basic structure of our human being which lies behind this myth of the fall, namely what he calls the transition from essence to existence. This transition is recognized not only in the biblical mythology but also in Greek philosophy, notably in Plato.

Here it may seem that Tillich is thinking of the Platonic distinction between finite particulars and the essential prototypes or forms. This would make the transition from essence to existence a kind of movement from a universal ideal to a particular, and inevitably imperfect realization of that ideal, and the fall of humanity would be equated with a transition from the essential ideal of humanity to the existence of the particular finite person, a transition which can be located at the birth or even the conception of any and every individual.

If this were true, however, the transition could not be said in any sense to belong to the biography of the person. It would set the condition for there being a biography at all, but it would not itself belong to that biography. In some ways this does seem to come close to Tillich's interpretation and yet he is clearly unready to accept it. While he certainly cannot treat the Adam and Eve story as if it told us of something that actually happened once upon a time, he is not prepared to say that the fallenness of humanity is simply something that belongs to 'the nature of things', something which characterizes the created order. If this were the situation then, says Tillich, 'Symbolically speaking, sin would be seen as created, as a necessary consequence of man's essential nature. But sin is not created, and the transition from essence to existence is a fact, a story to be told and not a derived dialectical step. Therefore,' he concludes, 'it cannot be completely demythologized.'

How then are we to understand this talk of transition from essence to existence? In Tillich's own account it soon becomes clear that what he has in mind is personal existence which he sees as self-determining existence. (In this we can see obvious kinship with certain aspects of German idealism and even more directly with existentialism.)

To exist he insists requires a certain positive element of self-affirmation. In the absence of this element one might certainly speak of a potential for personal existence, but if that potential is to be realized, or actualized, it must be realized in the actual affirmation of the Individual. In this context the essential being of a person refers not to a universal idea but rather to a particular potentiality which is my potentiality. It is of course a distinctively human potentiality and to this extent it relates my being to a universal idea if you like, but it is nonetheless my potentiality and if I am to exist in the world then I must actualize that potentiality in my own free act of self-affirmation.

This act can never be perfect or complete, however. The potential goes beyond the realization and so this actualization is a limitation, it limits my reality to what I actualize; in some ways indeed one might say it is a betrayal of my potential and so my actual existence is at odds with my essential potential. Furthermore, while the potential retains its ideally human character, the actualization falls short of the ideal and separates the particularity from its universal ideal possibility and in this my particularity sets me over against every other member of the race. And even beyond this, we may say that while the potentiality retains a basic relation with its ontological source, its creative ground as Tillich calls it, the actualization declares its independence of any such source; for in my existence I am self-established and self-declared. (Existence on this analysis being identical with self-affirmation.)

On the basis of some such analysis as this, Tillich holds that our existence is characterized by a three-fold estrangement. Estrangement from God (the ground of being), estrangement from other human beings, and estrangement within myself.
In all of this we might say that Tillich is offering us a kind of phenomenological analysis of the dynamics of personal being and becoming but at this point he introduces specifically theological terminology. This estrangement, he declares, is sin. It is what the theological term 'sin' refers to, namely the human alienation from God, which carries with it alienation from our fellows and alienation within ourselves.

At this point we may wonder whether Tillich is not backing away from the moral connotations of the word sin. Indeed it almost seems that sin for Tillich is not a moral concept at all, but an ontological one. That is to say it does not refer to culpable immoral actions, it refers to a basic character of human existence. Nor does Tillich shrink from this conclusion, for he insists that we should not speak of sins in the plural but only of sin in the singular. Yet at the same time he is prepared to argue that the so called sins (i.e. the culpable acts of wrong-doing) are the outcome of the sinful situation of our existence. And he is also at pains to insist that while sin is in a sense our fate (we are inevitably faced with the challenge of self-affirmation) it is also our fault, for the challenge is at the same time a temptation. To enter into life we must declare ourselves, become ourselves -- but this means we must eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil, we must take the responsibility of ourselves becoming arbiters of Good and Evil, of being like God, as the serpent expresses it in the story. This is our fate, but it is also our fault.

In the face of this human predicament, how does Tillich present the salvation offered in Christianity? At this point we might expect to find him abandoning his existential analysis and doing something rather more like preaching, but in fact it does not turn out that way. Through the whole development, the continual interweaving of existential and theological themes continues in a way which some of Tillich's theological critics see as smothering the distinctiveness of the Christian position completely.

In the first place we may say that for Tillich no message of salvation could meet our predicament unless it overcame the elements of estrangement implied in the transition from essence to existence. This may be attempted from within the structure by attempting to perfect the
basic act of self-affirmation itself. This has been attempted, Tillich suggests, through legalistic structures which attempt to regulate the will, through ascetic disciplines which seek to suppress the will, and through forms of mysticism which seek to abandon the will. But all of these are doomed to fail, for they are all self-determining programmes, except perhaps the last mystical option which is not so much self-determining as self-abandoning, but such abandonment leads not to salvation but to annihilation. Again, Tillich points to religiously ordered attempts to achieve salvation by ritual action (Sacramentalism), by doctrinal definition (fundamentalism), or by enthusiasm (revivalism), but all of these fail inasmuch as the divine presence is subordinated to the human actions, the human formulae, the human emotions.

All of these ways to salvation are considered by Tillich to be insufficient inasmuch as they arise from within the sphere of existential estrangement itself. But how could it be otherwise? If salvation demands an action which is not placed within the sphere of existential estrangement then such a salvation is beyond the sphere of existence itself. It does not exist! In the face of this impasse Tillich points to what he calls the paradoxical character of Christian theology. If anyone is in Christ, Paul declares, there is a new creation -- a new creature -- in Tillich’s phrase, New Being.

In Christ, he insists, New Being has appeared, but to say this, he then declares, is to say something paradoxical. In introducing this term, he assures us that he is not speaking of logical paradoxes in the formal sense, nor about dialectical structures of affirmation and negation, to be resolved in some kind of negation of the negation. Rather, he is speaking of something which goes against the fundamental doxa, the fundamental opinion, which lies at the base of all human existence. It is this basic view which establishes our world and our standing in that world. What is this fundamental doxa? It is a view which lies behind every kind of moralism; behind not only the Kantian doctrine of the autonomous will but also the imperative demands of natural law and divine law. It is the conviction that I must use my freedom to gain salvation or otherwise I must abdicate my freedom in resignation or perhaps more negatively in despair.
In Christian theology, Tillich maintains, this *doxa* is replaced by the *paradoxa* that I may accept my freedom without using it for anything: whether it be to affirm my existence or to deny my existence; neither is of any consequence. I can quite simply receive my existence not as a personal achievement, but as a gift. (Sin boldly, says Martin Luther, but believe more boldly.)

But having stated this *paradoxa*, why can we not simply lay hold of it without any reference at all to Jesus as the Saviour? Tillich speaks all the time as if it is the New Being which creates the new *doxa*, the paradox as he calls it, but surely we can argue this the other way: it is the new *doxa* which creates the New Being. And if this is so then while it may be of historical interest to know that it was Jesus who first lived his life on the basis of this view, now that the doctrine itself is available to us the historical question as to who first introduced it into our history becomes an academic question. No doubt, in a certain sense, one could on this analysis still speak of Jesus as Saviour and transformer of our lives, in much the same way as one might speak of Albert Einstein as transformer of our physics, but this seems to be a far weaker claim than traditional Christianity has made about Jesus and indeed it seems far weaker than the claim Tillich himself wants to make.

At this point Tillich's theology seems to be open to the same kind of criticism that Fritz Buri directed against Rudolf Bultmann's demythologizing proposals. If we are to interpret the mythology of the New Testament existentially, Buri argues, then we must go all the way and interpret the saving event of the cross existentially. Let us frankly admit that what this event does is to open our eyes, to make possible a new self-understanding. It does not in itself change anything; yet in opening up a new self-understanding it does change everything. Once we have recognized this, Buri argues, we can forget about the quasi-mechanistic claims of a once-for-all event which changes the course of history, and demythologizing can be completed de-kerygmatising.² We preach not the fact that Christ was crucified for our sins, we preach the new self-understanding which is revealed to us and exemplified in that event. Tillich's view, with its talk of a *paradoxa* to replace our universal *orthodoxa*, is subject to the same kind of logical extrapolation leading to the same kind of de-kerygmatising conclusion.
I suspect this line of discussion opens up a dilemma which in the end every Christian theologian has to struggle with. Are we saved because we believe the doctrine or do we believe the doctrine because the Saviour has saved us? This seems to be one of those chicken and egg questions which can never finally be answered.

Tillich's own answer would seem to demand that at the very least we must recognise that the self-understanding which I have called the orthodoxy from which we must be saved is not a kind of received teaching which can be opposed, challenged and surpassed by developing a new theory. It is too fundamental in constituting our existence to be treated in that dialectical manner. It needs to be overcome by a new creative action so that a new being can enter into our human scene; a being in which the merely potential character of essential being and the estranged self-determined character of existential being are both surpassed, so that existence and essence are united. And this demands a kind of existence which is not self-determined but determined by the creative ground of our potentiality, the essential ground of all being -- determined, in short, by the divine creator. And yet an existence which although not self-determined, nonetheless retains existential identity and existential freedom. This then is the framework in which Tillich can speak of 'the appearance of the eternal God-manhood under the conditions of existence'. This appearance is identified with that representation of New Being in Jesus as the Christ. This New Being is disclosed to us in three things about Jesus which shine through the New Testament witness to Jesus as the Christ: first and decisively, the undisrupted unity of the centre of his being with God; second, the serenity and majesty of him who preserves this unity against all attacks of estranged existence and third, as the self-surrendering love which represents and actualizes the divine love in taking existential destruction upon himself.

In all of this Tillich is certainly concerned to stress the centrality and importance of Jesus for his account of salvation presented in terms of New Being, but we may still be a little uncertain whether we should speak of Jesus as the exemplar or as the Saviour. Tillich would probably have said that both titles are appropriate. But he certainly has not been able to satisfy his critics on this point. Is it not his thesis, asks one of his
critics, that the New Being as an external principle of salvation somehow exists apart from, even though 'completely expressed in', the cross of Jesus? And this critic then goes on to argue that Tillich's treatment of the resurrection as a restitution in which Jesus' spirit witnessed to the reality of the New Being, is a darkening of orthodox Christian teaching.

As I said before, the issue at stake here is in its way a perennial problem for every Christian theology and if Tillich has not been entirely successful in resolving it that is hardly surprising. To complete this sketch there is one more issue I would like to address. Several times in the course of this conference the question has been raised as to whether particular theologians consider salvation only in its individualistic dimensions rather than seeing it in social or historic dimensions. In his Systematic Theology the social dimensions of salvation are considered in his last section on History and Kingdom of God, but in fact I think his best insights into these issues are not found in the Systematic Theology at all. They are found in the various essays and papers he wrote in the 1920s in Germany. At that time a great struggle was going on between the International socialists of the Communist Party and the national socialists of the Nazi Party to capture the German soul, and over against both of these was a small group of people, mainly academics I suspect, who called themselves Religious Socialists. Tillich was one of these.

In his writings of that period he speaks of society developing its constitution, its statutory laws, and its common mores which are then imposed on the individuals and groups in the society from outside as it were. This situation Tillich describes as 'heteronomous'. The law imposed is not my law, it is a restraint imposed upon me from outside. In reaction to this, the members of the state may claim their personal freedom and attempt to make room for more autonomy; if they succeed the whole state may increasingly lose its heteronomous character and allow for a great deal of autonomy. In this I think we can see a dilemma which has something in common with the dilemma of the person caught in the tension between essence and existence. In a sense one can say the constitutions, the law and the common mores provide the potential for a just society, but the existing group of citizens find themselves estranged from that social essence and indeed it becomes a tyrannous imposition on their lives.
In the face of this situation Tillich points to a third possibility, the possibility of a theonomous society. In this kind of society constitution, law and mores would all stand in unbroken unity with the divine ground and source of all social history and you would have the possibility of a new creation in which the essential state was fulfilled in actual existence so that the merely potential character of law and mores and the estranged self-determined character of the autonomous citizen is surpassed.

This view has much in common with Marx's view of the classless society I think, but there is a difference in the way Tillich relates it to history. For Marx the classless society is seen as a goal which is to be reached through a working out of the dynamics of history; for Tillich, and this is very clearly stated in the History and Kingdom of God section of the System, the goal, the kingdom of God, is not something which the dynamics of history can create. It requires a new creation from outside history and here again he points to the event of Jesus as the Christ as being the bearer of this new creation. This means that for Tillich the people of Jesus, the Church as body of Christ, stands as a sign of that new creation which I am here linking with the theonomous society of the earlier essays; and in responding to the appropriate moments in history we may also serve to bring this hope and this promise to light in our political and social life.

This post-script on the social historic dimensions of salvation needs to be worked out more fully and it is no doubt full of limitations and inadequacies (and here I mean both in my sketch and also in Tillich's own treatment). Yet here as elsewhere I still find his account of salvation illuminating in a whole lot of ways, and at many points he does provide for me what he wanted his Systematic Theology to provide, namely a help in answering questions.

Notes


3. The phrase quoted appears on p.142 of *Systematic Theology*, II, but see the whole chapter on The New Being in Jesus as the Christ. (Ch.18, *op. cit.*)