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Tillich's Non-Symbolic Doctrine of God¹

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PAUL TILLICH is undoubtedly one of the best known figures in contemporary American theology. His critics are legion, but he is surrounded by an ever expanding group of disciples from various theological backgrounds. Dr. Robert Clyde Johnson speaks of the unquestioned importance of Tillich in these words.

There is a wide and serious diversity of reaction to the thought of Tillich in the theological world. One theologian suggests that he is Protestantism's twentieth-century Aquinas; and another equally eminent authority says, "There is no more dangerous theological leader alive than Dr. Tillich." Whatever the verdict of history will be about him, it will include an unhesitant recognition that here is one of those rare and great minds which leave the whole of civilization in their debt.²

Tillich's pen has now been silenced by death, and history has begun the process of rendering a verdict concerning his contributions. Since Tillich is hardly a creative genius of such dimensions, Dr. Johnson surely has overstated the case when he says that "the whole of civilization" will be indebted to him. Yet the tremendous influence that this thinker has exerted on the theological world gives some substance to the frequently spoken cliché: "Tillich cannot be ignored, he must be reckoned with by all thinking theologians of our day."

Perhaps we can best acquaint ourselves with the basic theological position of a man by examining his doctrine of God. The purpose of this article is to state briefly Tillich's non-symbolic doctrine of God, which is not an easy task since Tillich's theological opinions are couched in obscure philosophical language, and to offer a critical evaluation of this doctrine. Two major questions will be asked in connection with our evaluation: (1) does Tillich's doctrine of God convey meaning, and (2) is this doctrine compatible with the Biblical view of God?

Tillich's doctrine of God, as well as the rest of his theology, is based upon an elaborate system of ontology. Dr. Allan Killen in his book *The Ontological Theology of Paul Tillich* says that Tillich is the first thinker to work out an existentialistic theological ontol-

ogy."³ A well known contemporary philosopher, Dr. John Herman Randall, Jr., suggests that the theological thought of Tillich rests upon a "version of the ontological argument—rather, as for all true Augustinians, God neither needs nor can receive 'proof.'"⁴ Tillich, like Augustine, is influenced by Plato's wholistic view of the universe and refuses to separate theology and philosophy. Tillich would insist that St. Thomas, who adopted the atomistic approach to reality from Aristotle, led Christian thought astray by his separation of the realms of truth. The philosopher and theologian are presented as two sides of one coin in the thought of Tillich.

Tillich says that philosophy asks the questions and theology supplies the answers. However, it is difficult to distinguish the role of each discipline in the writings of Tillich. Tillich insists that the first philosophy of any system must be ontology since all epistemological and logical considerations presuppose some relationship to the "structure of being."⁵ Tillich offers a concise definition of ontology in the first volume of his *Systematic Theology*.

Ontology is not a speculative-fantastic attempt to establish a world behind the world; it is an analysis of those structures of being which we encounter in every meeting with reality.⁶

Tillich points out that since theology uses categories, laws, and concepts in its expressions it can not escape the question of being any more than can philosophy.⁷ In his German period Tillich says quite frankly that a division between philosophy and theology is impossible since both sciences are concerned about the structures common to all kinds of being.⁸ Later Tillich does attempt to separate the two on the basis of emphasis, concern, and content. However, Tillich proceeds in typical dialectical fashion to close the gap. He not only says that every creative philosopher is a "hidden theologian," but he brings the two completely back together when he discusses the "converging trends."⁹ It is evident from the beginning that Tillich's ontology plays a major role in his theology.¹⁰

We must realize as we develop Tillich's doctrine of God that his ontology forms the foundation of this doctrine in at least two ways. First of all, it forces us to ask the question of God, and secondly, it limits what can and cannot be said about God. Tillich believes that finitude is an omnipresent characteristic of all being on each level of ontological analysis. It is just this "finitude of being which drives us to the question of God."¹¹ Man's awareness of his finitude causes him to be filled with ontological anxiety which can not be removed but must be taken into one's person through ontological courage. Tillich contends: "The question of God is the question of the possibility of this courage."¹² Tillich says that the various classical arguments for the existence of God are valid inasmuch as they raise the question of God and recognize the unconditional element in the structure of reality. However, their conclusions are entirely false since they would establish the existence of God and

make Him into a person.¹³ We can easily see how Tillich's ontology limits our description of God when he insists that God does not exist, that God is not a being, that God is not personal nor related to man in the non-symbolic sense of the terms.

"God," says Tillich, "is the name for that which concerns man ultimately." For God to be "ultimate" He must be "unconditioned," and yet for God to be of "concern" He must be encountered "concretely."¹⁴ This tension between the "unconditioned" and the "concrete" elements in his thought about God has given rise to two different aspects of the doctrine of God as we find it in Tillich. We have chosen to label Tillich's non-symbolic doctrine of God as "hypertheism" since he claims that his doctrine goes "beyond naturalism and supranaturalism."¹⁵ Any type of theism goes beyond naturalism, which is a non-theistic position, but an attempt to go beyond classical theism, which Tillich calls "supranaturalism," must be a hypertheistic position. Our concern in this paper will be to focus our attention upon "hypertheism" in Tillich. However, it is impossible to discuss one side of Tillich's doctrine of God without an occasional reference to the other side.

Tillich explains that "ultimate concern" is an abstract translation of the great commandment found in Mark 12:29.¹⁶ The religious concern is ultimate and unconditional and it must involve the whole man. However, this concern may express itself in many different ways since, for example, Tillich insists that "he who seriously denies God affirms him."¹⁷ This conviction leads our author to contend that the only meaningful definition of atheism is the endeavor to remove any ultimate concern and "to remain unconcerned about the meaning of one's existence."¹⁸ The theologian must leave all preliminary concerns to the other sciences and concern himself only with that which is of ultimate concern. Tillich looks upon "idolatry" as the elevation of a preliminary concern to the level of ultimacy.¹⁹

Tillich argues that his idea of God as man's ultimate concern is a part of the basic structure of reality. "God as the ultimate in man's ultimate concern is more certain than any other certainty, even that of oneself," writes Tillich.²⁰ The structure of man's ultimate concern, which "logically precedes each of its historical manifestations," can be found in all religions. All religions, since they express an ultimate concern, can be seen as preparatory for final revelation. Man is driven to polytheistic structures because of the concreteness of his ultimate concern. However, he moves to "monotheistic structures" because of the reaction of the absolute element, and finally, he arrives at "trinitarian structures" because of the need for a balance between the two.²¹ The idea of a "trinity," Tillich says, is inclusive in all forms of monotheism; however, the number three has no special significance except that it comes the closest to an adequate description of the life-process. We must always bear in mind, Tillich insists, that trinity is a qualitative and not a quantitative characterization of God.²²

The theologian must concern himself first of all with the hypertheistic idea of God because if he wants to make clear what is implied in religious thought he should "begin with the most abstract and completely unsymbolic statement which is possible, namely, that God is being-itself or the absolute."²³ In his *Theology of Culture* Tillich says that the non-symbolic element in our image of God is that he is "ultimate reality" or "being-itself." "Certainly," he explains, "the awareness of something unconditional is in itself what it is, is not symbolic."²⁴

Tillich feels that his non-symbolic characterization of God must remain abstract and so he cautions his readers that "to speak unsymbolically about being-itself is untrue."²⁵ Tillich explains that describing God as "being-itself" means that God is the ground of the ontological structure of reality without being subject to this structure and if we say anything more than this about God we are using symbolic language.²⁶ Tillich admits that an early charge of pansymbolism by Professor Urban of Yale forced him to search for one "unsymbolic statement" about God. This led to Tillich's unsymbolic description of God as "being-itself."²⁷ In a later writing, however, Tillich also admits that the statement "everything we say about God is symbolic" must also be a non-symbolic statement about God. Then in harmony with his dialectical approach he goes on to warn his readers that to make one non-symbolic statement about God endangers his ecstatic-transcendent character.²⁸

Tillich's conviction that a "conditioned God is not God" led him to attempt to transcend theism with the idea of "the God above God."²⁹ In the second volume of the *Systematic Theology* Tillich tries to spell out the meaning of such a transcendent doctrine of God, which he claims goes "beyond naturalism and supernaturalism," by the introduction of the third way of understanding the term God called the "self-transcendent" or "ecstatic" method. Tillich contends that "supranaturalism" goes astray by changing the infinity of God into finiteness when it applies "an extension of the categories³⁰ of finitude" to God. On the other hand, "naturalism," which Tillich looks upon as a type of modern pantheism without the former religious quality of its affirmations, fails to recognize "the infinite distance between the whole of finite things and their infinite ground."³¹

Tillich points out that the two elements of this new definition of God are "self" and "transcending." To say that God is "transcending" is to say that he "infinitely transcends that of which he is the ground." Tillich sees this to mean that God "stands *against* the world, in so far as the world stands against Him," and that God "stands *for* the world, thereby causing it to stand for him." The only meaningful sense in which the "supra" in "supranaturalism" can be understood is in terms of this "mutual freedom from each other and for each other." Tillich further explains:

Only in this sense can we speak of 'transcendent' with respect to the relation of God and the world. To call God transcend-

ent in this sense does not mean that one must establish a 'super-world' of divine objects. It does mean that, within itself, the finite world points beyond itself. In other words, it is self-transcendent.³²

With this understanding of "transcending" in mind the need for "self" in this description becomes understandable:

the one reality which we encounter is experienced in different dimensions which point to one another. The finitude of the finite points to the infinity of the infinite. It goes beyond itself in order to return to itself in a new dimension. This is what 'self-transcendence' means. In terms of immediate experience it is the encounter with the holy, an encounter which has an ecstatic character. The term 'ecstatic' in the phrase 'ecstatic idea of God' points to the experience of the holy as transcending ordinary experience without removing it. Ecstasy as a state of mind is the exact correlate to self-transcendence as the state of reality.³³

Tillich contends that this view of God replaces the spatial imagery traditionally connected with God's relation to the world with the concept of "finite freedom." He says that neither the "in" of naturalism nor the "above" of supernaturalism can express God's relationship to the world since God is not related to the world in any spatial terms. Neither of these old ideas can express the freedom of the created "to turn away from the essential unity with the creative ground of its being" and this freedom, Tillich says, is identical with divine transcendence. Such freedom attributes two qualities to the created: (1) that it is "substantially independent of the divine ground"; and (2) that it remains in "substantial unity with it." If this latter point were not true then man would be without the power of being.³⁴ John A. T. Robinson in his book *Honest to God* states that Tillich's great contribution to theology is his reinterpretation of transcendence in a way "which preserves its reality while detaching it from the projection of supernaturalism." God is therefore brought down from the clouds and found in the "ecstatic" character of this world, as "its transcendent Depth and Ground."³⁵

In the interest of preserving the transcendence of God Tillich maintains that being-itself can never become *a* being, not even the "highest being." If God is looked upon as a being along side of others, he becomes subject to the categories of finitude. Theological theism errs by looking upon God

as a self which has a world, as an ego which is related to a thou, as a cause which is separated from its effect, as having a definite space and an endless time. He is a being, not being itself. As such he is bound to the subject-object structure of reality, he is an object for us as subjects.³⁶

When God is regarded as *a* being the situation is not changed by

calling Him the "highest" or "most perfect" being because when a person applies superlatives to God they become diminutives.

Tillich also argues that it is wrong to make God a person. "Ordinary theism," Dr. Tillich contends, "has made God a heavenly, completely perfect person who resides above the world and mankind." Tillich believes that the protest of atheism against such a highest person is correct since "there is no evidence for his existence, nor is he a matter of ultimate concern."³⁷

Tillich's hypertheistic idea of God would brand him as an outspoken atheist in the traditional sense of the word.³⁸ "God does not exist," Tillich emphatically states, "he is being-itself beyond essence and existence. Therefore, to argue that God exists is to deny him."³⁹ Tillich says that the "half-blasphemous and mythological concept of the 'existence of God' has arisen" out of the almost unavoidable attempt to make God an object by speaking of his existence.⁴⁰ Tillich uses strong language in contending that those who assert the existence of God can never reach Him. The scientists, according to Tillich, who have shown that no such being exists have not refuted religion but they have done it a great service.

They have forced it to reconsider and restate the meaning of the tremendous word God. Unfortunately, many theologians make the same mistake. They begin their message with the assertion that there is a highest being called God, whose authoritative revelations they have received. They are more dangerous for religion than the so-called atheistic scientists.⁴¹

This quotation illustrates the fact that Tillich is so convinced that the existence of a highest being is destructive to a correct idea of God that he is willing, at least by implication, to make such men as Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin more dangerous to religion in this respect than the "so-called atheistic scientists."

Tillich also refuses to look upon God as "universal essence" or to refer to Him as the cause or substance of the world in the non-symbolic sense.⁴² It is impossible to have a non-symbolic relation with God⁴³ and God can be spoken of as living only in symbolic terms.⁴⁴

We might begin our critical evaluation of Tillich's non-symbolic doctrine of God by trying to arrive at a clear meaning of the term "God" in his system. Certainly this is a difficult, if not an impossible, task. Dr. William L. Rowe frankly states in the introductory remarks of his article entitled "The Meaning of 'God' in Tillich's Theology" that it is not possible to find a clear meaning of the expression "God" as it is used by Tillich.⁴⁵ Let us examine several possibilities of what Tillich might mean when he speaks of "God."

The basic question in this area seems to be: "does the term 'God' in the thought of Tillich point to something real or something imaginary?" In our endeavor to answer this question we must seek to discover the relationship between God and the world since God is

understandable only in terms of some type of relation to the world. A consideration of the reality of these two terms, God and the world, and their relation to each other, is unavoidable in every system of theological thought. The naturalist would say that the world is real and that God is unreal, while most pantheists would reverse this statement and contend that God is real and the world is illusionary or unreal. The theist (or supernaturalist), on the other hand, would say that both terms refer to that which is real.

What would Tillich say about the reality of God and the world? He tells us that he wants to go "beyond naturalism and supranaturalism." Since Tillich would obviously agree with these two positions that the world is real we must interpret this statement in terms of their attitudes toward God. The only way that Tillich can go "beyond naturalism" is to assert that God is real. On the other hand, to go "beyond supranaturalism" would suggest that he wants to say that God is not real. Tillich would most likely respond at this point that he wants to go "beyond" the real (non-imaginary) God of supernaturalism. However, if a person goes "beyond" the real (non-imaginary) God of supernaturalism can his God truly be real? In order to determine whether God is real or imaginary for Tillich we can only consider what he says about God.

First of all, Tillich states emphatically, as we have already pointed out, that God does not exist. It is certainly understandable that Tillich would not want to speak of God existing in a finite manner. However, Tillich surely is aware of the fact that no thinker in the long stream of classical theism ever meant by God's existence that He was subject to the limitations of time and space. The great theologians in this tradition have all agreed with Philo that God created time as well as space, and the statement that God exists has consistently meant for them that He is real (non-imaginary). The noted philosopher of religion at the University of Texas, Dr. Charles Hartshorne, takes strong exception to Tillich's contention that God does not exist, insisting that it is arbitrary to say that existence means to be localized in space.⁴⁶ The equally prominent theologian, Dr. George Thomas of Princeton University, also contends that existence can be predicated of God, although not "contingent finite existence."⁴⁷ Does Tillich actually mean that God is not real by saying that He does not exist?⁴⁸ I would hesitate to give an unqualified answer to this question. However, I have found no clear passage in his writings to deny that this is what he is saying. Can *real* have any meaning other than *existent*, or any meaning that does not, not least, include "existing" as a part of its definition?

Secondly, Tillich defines God as man's "ultimate concern," explaining that this is an abstract translation of the great commandment found in Mark 12:29. Dr. Edward Dowey contends that Tillich makes a basic mistake by using the concept "ultimate concern" as derived from this passage as the first criterion of theology. In the first place, this commandment is drawn from the law aspect of Biblical religion and the *law* tells man, who is separated from God

by his sins, to do precisely what he cannot do, namely, love God. In the second place, the Christian is able to love God only in response to divine *agape*. This fact, which is ignored by Tillich, is implicit in the opening words of Mark 12:29: "Hear O Israel, the Lord thy God is one. . . ." Tillich ignores the covenant context of this passage and "abstracts" the ultimacy and the concern of the relationship which is then universally applied to man's religiousness. Therefore, Tillich's "abstract translation" overlooks the decisive element of the great commandment.⁴⁹ Dr. Dowey further suspects that Tillich has gained some common understanding with philosophy and the history of religion by "attaching himself to a de-covenanted legal side of Biblical religion," but it may be at the expense of losing the *kerygma* which Tillich says is essential for the correlation which makes up systematic thought.⁵⁰

Dr. Thomas feels that theology is in danger of becoming anthropocentric if it is restricted to matters of "ultimate concern." He infers that Tillich is over-influenced by the pre-occupation with man in Christian existentialism which blinds most existentialists to the fact that in Christianity there is a concern for God for His own sake. Tillich seems to have lost sight of the fact that man's salvation is not merely *from* threats to his being but it is also to love and fellowship with God.⁵¹

Dr. Rowe is concerned about "what must God be for Tillich if He is that about which we are ultimately concerned?" He thinks that the appropriate answer to this question would seem to be, "almost anything."⁵² However, it is evident that Tillich's answer to this question is more complex since he is not willing, for example, to identify God with a political movement. Dr. Rowe suggests, then, that Tillich may mean one of three possibilities when he describes God as man's ultimate concern. (1) Perhaps Tillich is using "ultimate concern" in a special sense to mean that one can be ultimately concerned only about being-itself. According to this view Tillich's definition that "X is ultimate concern" would entail the additional proposition that "X is ultimate concern about being-itself." (2) Tillich might mean that while we can be ultimately concerned about almost anything, the only satisfactory or appropriate object of ultimate concern is being-itself. (3) Tillich could maintain that ultimate concern, which is defined in terms of certain feelings and attitudes focused on specific objects, is basically directed toward being-itself.⁵³ Tillich is definitely ambiguous in defining ultimate concern in his writings, as Dr. Rowe recognizes; however, it seems that his definition of idolatry requires the second alternative as coming closest to his position.

In spite of some vagueness in his use of "ultimate concern" it is clear that Tillich believes that man's ultimate concern must involve a total commitment to "that which determines our being or non-being," being-itself. This relation of ultimate concern to being-itself raises an interesting problem: "how can a person be completely dedicated to being-itself?" Tillich recognized the problem

of being dedicated to that which is not a concrete entity and tried to solve this dilemma by his introduction of the religious symbol since all objects of religious devotion point to the metaphysical ultimate, being-itself. Whereas, for Tillich, the philosophical and theological symbols vary, their referent (being-itself) always remains the same.⁵⁴

It appears from these considerations that the term ultimate concern offers us no new insight into the reality of God for Tillich unless we can understand what he means by "being-itself." What does a description of God as "being-itself" tell us about God if He does not exist and he is not personal in the non-symbolic sense? I suppose Tillich would say that we cannot know anything about God *as such* either from natural knowledge or from revelation. Can we say that a God who is entirely *Deus Absconditus* refers to anything that is real? I do not think so. Tillich further explains that to say that God is "being-itself" is to say that He is the "ground of the ontological structure" or that He is the structure. Again I would ask if this tells us anything about the meaning or reality of God.

Perhaps we can make some sense out of Tillich's statements by understanding them in pantheistic terms. Tillich's contention that God is the ontological structure or the "ground" and "power" of this structure would be understandable in the framework of pantheism. Tillich defines pantheism to mean that God "is the creative power and unity of nature, the absolute substance which is present in everything."⁵⁵ Tillich certainly suggests the possibility that he is a pantheist when he writes that

The divine life is infinite, but in such a way that the finite is posited in it in a manner which transcends potentiality and actuality. Therefore it is not precise to identify God with the infinite.⁵⁶

We could understand this statement to mean that God is in some way both the infinite and the finite and our suspicions about the understanding of "being-itself" in pantheistic terms would be confirmed. In the above quotation, however, Tillich may mean only that the finite has its source in the infinite and does not affect God's separateness from the universe. Since Tillich says that he does not want to be a pantheist we must give him the benefit of doubt.⁵⁷

Dr. Rowe objects to Tillich's description of God as "being-itself" on two very logical grounds. (1) This term, as well as the "ground of being" and "the power of being," tells us nothing about the meaning of the word "God" since it must also be explained. (2) The term "God" is primarily a religious term while the phrases used by Tillich to explain this term are primarily philosophical.⁵⁸ However, this last objection is valid only if the philosophical terms prove to be inadequate to convey the religious meaning.

Tillich has obviously introduced the philosophical concept "being-itself" in an effort to illustrate the tensions present in all

religious discourse about God. The value of such a translation into metaphysical statements will depend upon our understanding of "being-itself." Dr. Rowe concludes his discussion on the validity of Tillich's use of ontological terms to describe God by pointing out that on Tillich's own account "being-itself" is an ineffable term and, therefore, it cannot possibly explain to us what Tillich means by the term "God."⁵⁹

Tillich admits in Volume Two of the *Systematic Theology* that much confusion has developed from his statement that God is "being-itself." Therefore, he attempts to further explain this term by describing his doctrine of God as one that is "self-transcendent" or "ecstatic."⁶⁰ As we indicated earlier in this paper "self-transcendent," in Tillich's doctrine of God, has to do with God's relation to the world. It is understandable for Tillich to introduce this question into the discussion because it is quite obvious that God can have meaning only in relation to the world. If we assume that the two terms "God" and "world" refer to that which is real we have four logically possible ways in which they may be related. (1) God may be independent of the world while the world is dependent upon God. (2) God may be dependent upon the world while the world is independent of God. (3) God may be dependent upon the world and the world also dependent upon God. (4) God may be independent of the world and the world at the same time independent of God. The first alternative makes the existence of the world depend upon God; the second makes the existence of God dependent upon the world; the third makes each mutually dependent upon the other for existence; and the fourth regards each as ultimate and existing independent of the other. The first position is that of theism, and Biblical theism would slightly modify this position by adding that the dependence of the world had a beginning. The second position would be followed by the naturalist, while the third position would embrace the pantheist, and the fourth would make room for deism.

If both entities "God" and "world" refer to that which is real in Tillich, how are they related? Tillich tells us in a quote found above that God and the world have "mutual freedom from each other and for each other." What can this statement possibly mean? Is Tillich trying to hold to mutual dependence and mutual independence at the same time? Such an attempt might sound appealing in theory but in fact it is nothing more than dialectical nonsense.⁶¹ Dr. Hendry remarks that if Tillich goes beyond naturalism, "it is in much less measure than he goes beyond supernaturalism." Dr. Hendry contends that Tillich's idea that the finite world points not literally beyond but *within* itself has moved transcendence from the supernatural to the infranatural, and, "in addition, made it contingent in the process."⁶² This evaluation of Tillich's dimension of depth, which is so highly prized by Bishop Robinson, seems to be perfectly in keeping with Tillich's statements on this point.

Tillich would undoubtedly answer that we are confusing the picture by using spatial imagery in an attempt to relate God and the world. The "true relation between God and the world," Tillich argues, is not to be found in spatial terms but in terms of "finite freedom." This finite freedom, which has already been explained in this article, means that man is "substantially independent of the divine ground" and at the same time he remains "in substantial unity with it." This seems to make the logically impossible point that man is both dependent and independent. Tillich's attempt to substitute dialectical imagery for spatial imagery fails to communicate meaning because his terms are logically contradictory. ✓

Tillich's use of "self-transcendent" means that the "finite world points beyond itself." We need not take issue with this point. Our concern is to find out to what the finite points. The only available answer still seems to be the ineffable term "being-itself." Perhaps we must accept the fact that Tillich's God must always remain *Deus Absconditus*?

The second term used to describe Tillich's new way of approaching God is "ecstatic." An honest attempt to understand this description leads us beyond the scope of this present article into a discussion of Tillich's view of revelation. However, it should be stated that revelation in the thought of Tillich opens up new dimensions of the mystery of being but that it does not impart any knowledge about facts nor information about "being-itself."⁶³ This fact would force us to conclude that we cannot find the answer to our question about the meaning and reality of God in the thought of Tillich by considering his idea of revelation.

It is immediately apparent that it is impossible for those of us who are committed to a belief in the inspiration and authority of Scripture to allow Tillich to reduce the many concrete statements about God found in the Bible to the nebulous concept of "ultimate concern" or "being-itself." It also appears that Dr. Gordon Kaufman is not misrepresenting Tillich by insisting that the answers, as well as the questions, in Tillich's theology come from his philosophical-ontological analysis of the structure of being. It is very significant, according to Dr. Kaufman, that the only non-symbolic statement that Tillich is willing to make about God is the ontological affirmation that God is "being-itself." Dr. Kaufman also confesses that the appearance of Volume Two of Tillich's *Systematic Theology* has confirmed his suspicion that Tillich is moving away from historically oriented thinking toward a kind of gnosticism.⁶⁴ Dr. George Thomas adds along these same lines that it is the impersonal philosophy of Tillich, so alien to the spirit of Christianity, that has caused him to distort the Biblical picture of God.⁶⁵

Dr. Frederick Sontag argues that the rigid requirements of Tillich's ontology have caused him to reduce artificially the idea of God found in the Bible to the subject category of "ultimate concern." Dr. Sontag suggests that the personal requirements of God in Scrip-

ture could be preserved by replacing Tillich's ideas of unity and necessity as the central requirements of ontology with the categories of possibility and infinity.⁶⁶ Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr charges that Tillich has ignored the doctrine of "original sin" presupposed in all "Biblical thinking." Tillich, Niebuhr writes, has distorted the Biblical picture by viewing "original sin" as an ontological fate rather than a historical tragedy.⁶⁷ Dr. Hendry levels an open charge that Tillich has lost the substance of Biblical religion. He writes:

But, however Christian he may be in intent (as all heretics have been), he cannot prevent his readers from shying at what looks suspiciously like an attempt to put Hindu wine in Christian bottles.⁶⁸

I think that we might justly conclude in our specific concern with Tillich's doctrine of God that he has attempted to put "ontological wine" into "Christian bottles." Even the philosopher Charles Hartshorne admits that Tillich has replaced the Biblical concept of a God who lovingly responds to His creatures with the "indifferent absoluteness of 'unconditioned' being." This fact leads Hartshorne to the penetrating conclusion that Whitehead's God is closer to Christianity than Tillich's God.⁶⁹

The theology of Paul Tillich is not a message about which a theologian can remain neutral. Tillich's ontology is comprehensive and profound. However, I am persuaded on the basis of logical considerations that Tillich's definition of God as "being-itself," and his explanation of this term, offers no meaningful understanding of God. I am also forced to conclude that Tillich's non-symbolic doctrine of God is not compatible with the traditional Biblical view of God.

FOOTNOTES

1. In his writings Dr. Tillich distinguished between the non-symbolic statement (or statements) that can be made about God and those which must have only symbolic meaning. Since any symbolic knowledge of God is meaningful only as it is related to its non-symbolic foundation this article will deal with "hypertheism" in Tillich's formulation of his doctrine. This term was suggested by Dr. John Laird who says that Tillich's idea of God goes beyond the "God" of ordinary theism and hence is hypertheistic. See John Laird, "Theism and Hypertheism," *Harvard Theological Review*, XXXVI (Jan., 1943), pp. 70 ff.; also Edward Farley, *The Transcendence of God* (The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1960), pp. 82 ff. "Hypertheism" will be further defined in the contents of this paper.
2. Robert Clyde Johnson, "A Theology of Synthesis," *Theology Today*, Vol. 15, No. 1, p. 42.
3. R. Allan Killen, *The Ontological Theology of Paul Tillich* (J. H. Kampen, Kok, 1956), p. 111.
4. John Herman Randall, Jr., "The Ontology of Paul Tillich," *The Theology of Paul Tillich* (The Macmillan Co., New York, 1952) p. 136.
5. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1951), p. 20. (Hereafter referred to as S. T., I.)
6. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
8. Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era* (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1948), p. 86. (Hereafter referred to as P.E.)
9. *S.T.*, I, pp. 22-25.
10. Since it is beyond the scope of this paper to give a detailed presentation of Tillich's ontology I must refer the reader to several sources. Tillich offers us the most systematic presentation of his ontology in the second half of the first volume of his *Systematics*, pp. 163-210. See also Randall's discussion of Tillich's ontology, *op. cit.*, pp. 132-161.
11. *S.T.*, I, p. 166.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 194.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 204-208.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 211.
15. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. II (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1957), p. 5. (Hereafter referred to as *S.T.*, II.); see footnote one concerning the origin of the term "hypertheism."
16. *S.T.*, I, pp. 11,12.
17. *P.E.*, p. xv. (Tillich makes the same point in his *Dynamics of Faith* where he writes: "he who denies God as a matter of ultimate concern affirms God, because he affirms ultimacy in his concern," p. 46.
18. Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (Harper & Brothers, New York, 1957), p. 45.
19. *S.T.*, I, pp. 12, 13.
20. *D.F.*, p. 47.
21. *S.T.*, I, p. 221.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 228.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 235-236.
24. Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (Oxford U. Press, New York, 1959), p. 61. Hereafter referred to as *T.C.*)
25. Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (Yale U. Press, New Haven, 1952), p. 180. (Hereafter referred to as *C. to B.*)
26. *S.T.*, I, p. 239.
27. Paul Tillich, "Autobiographical Reflections" *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, *op. cit.*, p. 334.
28. *S.T.*, II, p. 9.
29. *C. to B.*, p. 182.
30. Tillich says that the four basic categories of finitude by which we know self and world are: (1) time, (2) space, (3) causality, and (4) substance. See *S.T.*, I, pp. 192-198.
31. *S.T.*, II, pp. 5-7.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
34. *Ibid.*
35. John A. T. Robinson, *Honest To God* (The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1963), p. 56.
36. *C. to B.*, pp. 184-185.
37. *S.T.*, I, p. 245.
38. Atheism has traditionally been defined as the denial of the existence of God.
39. *S.T.*, I, p. 205.
40. *T.C.*, p. 25.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.
42. *S.T.*, I, p. 236.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 271.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 242.
45. William L. Rowe, "The Meaning of 'God' in Tillich's Theology," *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 42, No. 4, p. 274.
46. Charles Hartshorne, "Tillich's Doctrine of God," *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, *op. cit.*, p. 186.
47. George F. Thomas, "The Method and Structure of Tillich's Theology," *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
48. Hartshorne argues that we must either concede divine existence or reject the conception of God as meaningless or absurd. See *The Logic of Perfection* (Open Court Pub. Co., LaSalle, 1962), p. 137f.
49. Edward A. Dowey, Jr., "Tillich, Barth, and The Criteria of Theology," *Theology Today*, Vol. XV, No. 1, pp. 49-50. Dr. Dowey also suggests that this offers one an interesting parallel to the way in which the Pharisees had "abstracted" a formal criterion of theology from their understanding of the law at the time of Christ.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
51. *Op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.
52. *Op. cit.*, p. 274.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 275. (The third view differs from the first in that it makes the connection between ultimate concern and being-itself a metaphysical assertion, rather than an analytic necessity following from a special definition of "ultimate concern.")
54. Paul Tillich, *Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality* (U. of Chicago Press, Chicago, Ill., 1955), p. 85.
55. *S.T.*, I, p. 233.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 252.
57. *S.T.*, I, p. 236.
58. *Op. cit.*, pp. 280-281.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 285.
60. *S.T.*, II, p. 7.
61. See David H. Freeman, *Tillich* (Baker, Grand Rapids, 1962) for a discussion of the relation between God and world in Tillich.
62. George S. Hendry, "Review of Tillich's Systematic Theology" Vol. II, *Theology Today*, Vol. 15, No. 1, p. 79.
63. Cf. *S.T.*, I, pp. 106-159 for a complete discussion of revelation by Tillich.
64. Gordon D. Kaufman, "Can a Man serve Two Masters?," *Theology Today*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 62-63.
65. *Op. cit.*, pp. 103-104.
66. Frederick Sontag, "Ontological Possibility and the Nature of God: A Reply to Tillich," *Journal of Religion*, Vol. 36, No. 3, p. 238.
67. Reinhold Niebuhr, "Biblical Theology and Ontological Speculation," *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, *op. cit.*, pp. 218-219.
68. *Op. cit.*, p. 80.
69. *The Logic of Perfection*, *op. cit.*, p. 144.