

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY VOL. I. ~ PAUL TILLICH

Vol 1 (1953) Vol 2 (1957) Vol 3 (1964) Combined Vol 1968 James Nisbet

These books are works of intensely complex philosophical theology and so these notes are comparatively thin & selective. I have used quotations extensively

Vol 1, consists of eleven chapters and is divided into 2 parts.

PART I: Ch I-VI Reason and Revelation, (notes on separate paper)

Tillich begins his work by insisting (Introduction: A Point of View) that every theologian is in their own 'situation' trying to interpret the truth to it, but we mistake situation-based interpretations of all the ages for the truth it seeks to interpret. In other words our own context is of great importance and must be acknowledged. His 'system' will seek a 'correlation' of his modern situation and the apostolic faith – the kerygma.

Chapter I.

The Theological Circle traps all theologians. Theology can be offered as an 'empirical science' where we work 'inductively from experience, but it fails because so often the individual's bias about their experience overwhelms and that arises from their pre-existent *a priori* assumptions. That makes them 'deductive' not 'inductive' thinkers.

Theology can also be offered as 'metaphysical awareness' where a mystical experience then presents an *a priori* certainty about the general which can then be cascaded down to deduced truths about experience.

We see then that both the 'naturalist' and the "idealist' are deriving their theology from prior awareness of certainty – even if the theologian wants to see it 'proved' in practice of faith. This is Tillich's necessary 'theological circle'. He goes on to say that only in Christ do we see the absolute concrete (empirical bias) and the absolute universal (mystical) in one, which is to say, he is Logos who has become flesh thus correlating the theological circle in himself.

The Theologian wants to interpret the Christian message, but the Philosopher of Religion is less committed to one truth.

To be Theology it must deal with: 1. our Ultimate Concern, and 2. this means it concerns our Being or non-Being.

The early Franciscans had an existentialist relation to truth, a powerful and practical knowledge, touching and tasting the spiritual within their experience. This was inherited by Methodism, Evangelicalism etc. and give theological expression in Schleiermacher's method, describing religion the 'feeling of absolute dependence' where 'feeling' means immediate sense of something unconditional, transcending intellect and will, subject and object and 'dependence' as a realisation of telos, not denying freedom. Yet he did not remember that Christianity is also mediated through historical event.

Chapter III. Here Tillich embarks on analysis of how reason works. 1. ‘Ontological Reason’ is the structure of the mind enabling it to grasp and transform reality: includes cognitive, aesthetic, practical, technical, emotional functions of mind. It is Logos and can comprehend the world because it in turn has a logos character. The logos of the reasonable mind is the subject and the logos of the world is the object. 2. ‘Technical Reason’ reduces this to the Means by which reason happens and does not bother with the end and norm to which reason operates.

Reason is bound, is finite, and cannot break out beyond limits of causality, but Kant realised that when it comes to Moral experience, there reason finds a new freedom to reach beyond where something unconditional breaks in. Here an ‘imperative’ operates.

Reason is a powerful force, theonomy being God’s rationality, autonomy our own subjective reasoning, heteronomy the reasoning of another which is then imposed (as in political despotism)

Knowledge requires distance for the subject to scrutinise the object and yet a union as the one acquires the other. Plato believed we were one with all before birth and education was a re-acquiring of the union, we also wonder how knowledge can grasp reality and not just appearance. We passionately want knowledge because it reunites us with that which has become strange – alienated. This grasping of knowledge, this reconciliation is healing and creatively energising. Being at one with the unity heals and transforms according to Asian religion too (but they fail to recognise the distance in cognition between subject and object)

Before discussing Revelation Tillich looks finally at the nature of Truth and Verification: [p. 112] Reality in itself is what ‘is’ and that can neither be true nor false it just is. Things hide their true being beneath what can be discerned through the senses or opinions, this essence is their true being. Eg. We see a person and think we have known true person but later have to adjust judgement – and do this continually. To verify a thing we must repeat the experiment but an experience is not of that sort, it cannot be put in the lab and repeated. Science helps us look (psychology etc) but life-process itself runs on before it, spontaneously and it individual. If we participate in that life we get close to a new verification of **‘knowledge by participation’, and that’s where ‘intuition’ comes into its own.**

Naturalists and Positivists reduce ‘truth’ to that which is empirically verified but that only attains to *‘controlling’ knowledge*. It is safe but not significant as opposed to *‘receiving’ knowledge* which is significant but cannot give certainty – faith must always include doubt.

Chapter V: THE MEANING OF REVELATION.

Tillich first adopts Husserl’s method of *Phenomenology*: describing the meaning of things before moving to ask if it is real. Because you cannot approve or reject before understanding it.

Revelation (lit: ‘removing the veil’)

That which is hidden is the mystery but can no longer be mystery if shows in normal sense. Cognition is not applicable but Experience can be – but to express it ordinary language clearly will not do.

Its reality can be known through revelatory experience but remains mysterious, and always must. Reason must be driven beyond itself – transcendent. Mystery expresses itself in symbolism and manifests our ultimate concern. But the negative side must therefore be present which accounts for the experience of the ‘dark night’ of meditation, for without this there would be no mystery in the experience.

Because it is an experience of the ‘ground’ of our being, it is invariably related to feelings of shaking, transformation, demanding, significant. A revelation about a person or thing must be checked by scientific method but true revelation verifies itself about the ground of being.

In Revelation the subject and object of the communication interrelates, the subject grasps the object but is grasped by it. It can involve ecstasy (lit standing outside one’s self) but more than excitement.

Miracle is dangerous word when understood as an absurd happening, To believe that the more absurd, the more revelatory it is, would be ridiculous!

The Sign however terrifies and overawes onlookers with numinous presence. Extraordinary regular signs manifest the logos quality of the Ground of Being. The Extraordinary irregular sign shows the ground’s abyss quality and the paradoxical elements in faith – notes Kierkegaard.

Knowledge of self and world cannot lead to revelation of Ground of Being but leads us to ask the question. To go further with the self or world requires sign-event and revelation event in itself. Historical happening, or the life of a saint, are transparent for the ground of being and myth and holy legend will interpret this transparency. (Synoptics are full of this)

Word as revelation: Words run between the poles of the denotive and expressive. Words are not revealed but revelation can occur through them when the ground of being self-expresses within the sound and voice of them as they become transparent.

An original revelation can be called ‘Inspiration’ which a dependent illumination of it can be called ‘Illumination’. So in the later sense a prayer can be given and if fully lived can be inspired inspiration.

No individual receives revelation for themselves but for his her group and the world.

Revelation can come to an end when a medium no longer is transparent to the originating revelation for the one experiencing it now. So eg there is no revelation in BVM for protestants.

Sometimes matters of ultimate concern are discussed as if they were matters of ordinary knowledge – but this can only distort the experience which is an object-subject relationship which remains mystery.

Symbol and Analogy are methods of expressing the revelation but arguing about the symbols and analogies take material from finite reality to talk about infinite and therefore distortion and muddle can set in.

Chapter VI. Actual Revelation and Reality

Tillich now moves from phenomenological analysis to verification and beyond.

The receiver of a revelatory experience believes it a truth about the mystery of being and their relation to it. Hindu: ecstatic experience of the Brahman power as ultimate, Humanist: heroic subjection to moral principle, but for both they do not

lead to a final reality since for the Hindu it is the experience that is paramount and for the Humanist it is simply autonomy. Christian however claims revelation in Jesus is the final (ie thorough not chronological) revelation. Only Jesus becomes completely transparent to the Mystery he reveals. And this because only he has no separation from the mystery. Devil tempts him to claim ultimacy for his finite nature and run from self-sacrifice. Idolatry is the elevation of the medium of revelation to the status of the revealed. He sacrifices all that is finite in himself – all his historical existence – thus liberating us who follow from his finite condition world view – so he now becomes grace and truth and not just law. He is Christ because he does not insist on ‘equality with God’ renouncing it as a personal possession, thus becoming a new creature – Spirit. John reflects on this as he has Jesus state that he had nothing of himself but only from his Father, thus total transparency, as he continuously surrenders the Jesus who is Jesus in him to the Jesus who is the Christ. “He who believes in me does not believe in me..” John 12:44

History of Revelation: all that prepares for or receives the ‘final’ revelation in Jesus. Sacrament continues to illustrate and interpret for new believers.

OT Historical preparation but is also full of nasty nationalism (which the German Tillich abhors) but shows that the OT fights against this nationalism esp in the prophets. True God rejects unjust Israel since their election carries the risk of rejection (which could not be case in polytheism where they are mutually locked)

p.159 – “The history of Israel shows that no group can be the bearer of the final revelation, that it cannot perform a complete self-sacrifice. The break through and the perfect self-surrender must happen in a personal life, or it cannot happen at all.”

Revelation only happens in presence of Salvation: when salvation is realisation of reunion with the ground of our being. If revelation is thought to mean information about God then it can be used by authoritarian religious bodies who treat content as commodities they own.

Revelation for finite receivers is always fragmentary but so is salvation which is coterminous. So as Luther saw, feelings of rejection is first step in salvation and is only finally consummated in the Kingdom of God when all becomes transparent to its being.

While Jesus renounces use of his divine authority for the sake of Jesus as Jesus, the Church is always tempted to use revelation for its own sake in authoritarian manner and remains stuck with its own finitude – and yet it is also the New Being. It is mired thus in conflicts of existence and puts down criticism. (‘heteronomy’ over ‘theonomy’ in Tillich’s terms)

Final Revelation fulfils Reason by appearing in the form of the Concrete Absolute. It gives us examples which point to that which is absolute, but the examples are not absolute in themselves.

p.168 *“The words of Jesus and the apostles point to this New Being; they make it visible and through stories, legends, symbols, paradoxical descriptions, and theological interpretations. But none of these expressions of the experience of the final revelation is final and absolute in itself. They are conditioned, relative, open to change and additions.”*

“The absoluteness of love is its power to go into the concrete situation, to discover what is demanded by the predicament of the concrete to which it turns...Love conquers them without producing cognitive scepticism or aesthetic chaos or lawlessness or estrangement.”

Decisions based on love are not closed to the other possibilities – love does not exclude.

Emotion is taken by some as arch-enemy of knowledge but the notion of Gnosis/Biblical knowledge (cognitive, sexual and mystical knowing) includes the whole ‘mind’ acting rationally.

Mystical experience is assumed to be result of a finite being in meditation, but term ‘Ground of Being’ indicates the transcendence of the experience.

Divine Life:

Is mysterious, ineffable in its depth – termed therefore the *Abyss*.

Its meaning and structure are termed the *Logos*.

Its dynamic unity of Abyss and Logos is termed the *Spirit*.

A revelation is:

mysterious (not just informative) because of God’s Abysmal character.

Revelation is possible (not irrational) because of God’s Logical character.

It is receivable (not solipsistic) because of God’s Spiritual character.

‘THE WORD OF GOD’ is God manifest.

1 although abysmal, God includes Logos. 2 the Word mediates between the abysmal, silent mystery, and the concrete. 3 the Word is the manifestation to those receiving the revelation. 4 the Word is Jesus as the Christ, manifesting the divine life in the concrete conditions of existence. 5 the Word is the document of the final revelation, like a sacrament participating in the logos of its formation. 6 the Word is the message of the church.

PART II: Ch VII - XI, Being and God.

Section I: Being and the Question of God.

Chapter VII: Ontological Structure and Elements

Q: What is Being-itself? When something is said to 'be'.

The question arises at the shock of possible non-being. 'Why not nothing?'

Being is ontologically essential and ontologically existential.

Plato hypostasised the two as separate realms, Aristotle combined them in the polar relation of potentiality and actuality. Heidegger, Kierkegaard etc said they were in tension one with another. Others that they were derived from each other.

Ontological concepts must be *a priori* – they determine the nature of experience, and yet are derived from critical analysis of experience and are presupposed in every experience. This does not mean they are static – for example, human nature changes in history.

The human being alone is aware of Being. Man can describe behaviour of other beings but we cannot know what that means to them, as we can for our own being.

Man does not stand out from other objects as an object but does stand out as the only one where our awareness asks the question of ontology. Heidegger in *Zeit und Sein* says Dasein – 'being there' – is the place where being is manifest. The Self – the experience of self – puts us into that place.

The 'Self' includes ego, unconscious, subconscious etc. a self-consciousness who belongs to every other self and yet is to be distinguished from them. Self and environment determine each other, yet self transcends it too by having a self-world relationship. When Man looks at world he is the perceiving centre yet knows himself there as a spec.

p. 190. A Summary:

"We have described the world as a structured whole, and we have called its structure 'objective reason'. We have described the self as a structure of centredness, and we have called this structure 'subjective reason'. And we have stated that these correspond to each other..... Without reason, without logos of being, being would be chaos, that is, it would not be being but only the possibility of it (me on). But where there is reason there are a self and a world in interdependence. The function of the self in which it actualises its rational structure is the mind, the bearer of subjective reason. Looked at by the mind, the world is reality, the bearer of objective reason."

Theology must always remember that in speaking of God it has made an object of that which can only be subject, an object, a thing which therefore would be determined. When selves are transformed into things we have injustice.

We cannot derive the subject from the object (deductive idealism)

Individualisation and Participation:

Genesis God creates not universals but particular beings. p.195: *“The uniqueness of every person was not established until the Christian church acknowledged the universality of salvation and the potentiality of every human being to participate in it.”* This shows interdependence of individuality and participation. Through the universals Man participates in every small section of reality. *“No individual exists without participation, and no personal being exists without communal being.”* The lover participates in the Beloved and vice versa. In Christ we participate in New Being. Man cannot however conquer another person without destroying them as a person – making them object.

There is a dynamic quality to Being which is its tendency to transcend itself in creating new forms, yet it also seeks to conserve itself as the basis of its transcendence – therefore we can speak of Being always implying Becoming. So Man creates tools to transcend, and at same time they in turn transform him.

Individual’s ‘freedom’ is polar to their ‘destiny’ since the latter is the whole of us and our environment determining our decision-making.

Chapter VIII Being, Finitude and the question of God.

Man can think of non-being so can recognise mystery of being. Even to think of non-being as empty space is to give it being. The nihilo out of which God creates is the undialectical negation of being.

The anticipation of nothingness at death gives human existence its existential character. The object of anxiety is ‘nothingness’ and having to die is experienced from the inside of the experience, thus shaping spiritual life as it impacts body and soul. Man is thus courageous.

All Being seeks Space, a physical location (a place, a body) and social space (a vocation, a group, a structure of meanings) and not to have space is not to be. But the anxiety is there of eventually having to lose one’s place and so not to be. Insecurity!

Causality reminds us that since everything has a cause it therefore relies on something beyond itself for its being – so reminds us of abyss of non being. There is no necessity for us to be.

The distinction between essence and existence is in theological terms like speaking of the distinction between created world and actual world.

The so-called Ontological Argument:

Scholastics did not mean ‘existence’ of God but the reality of God, and the arguments for existence of God are not proofs but ways of stating the question of God implied in the experience of finitude. And the awareness of God precedes the question.

And Man’s awareness of their finitude is because Man is aware of infinity.

p. 229: *The presence within finitude of an element which transcends it is experienced both theoretically and practically. The theoretical side has been elaborated by Augustine, the practical side by Kant, and behind both of them stands Plato.*” All of this exploration shows something unconditional is within the self and the world.

The Cosmological (bearer of infinite being) and Teleological (bearer of infinite meaning) Arguments for God’s existence/reality move from the special characteristics of the world to existence of a highest being. The anxiety of both questions (our loss of being and meaning) is the human ontological anxiety.

Part II, section 2: The Reality of God.

ch IX: The Meaning of God:

“whatever concerns a man ultimately becomes god for him”. A phenomenological description of ‘God’ being which transcends realm of ordinary experience with which man has surpassing relations. Magic is when man uses power of their god by asking favours so keep to thanksgiving ~ but religious practice runs counter to this hope. Imperialism is not for power so much as accomplishment of values, represented by ‘gods’, used for human purpose. Holiness more than emotional aesthetic (Otto is close to this). Holy is the quality of what concerns man ultimately (god). Holy objects point to the ultimate – if they claim holiness they are demonic. Holiness is not same as ‘unclean’ nor ‘secular’, but Puritans took this too far to mean Holy is clean. ‘Secular’ likewise can be too binary, since ‘God is All in All!’, but those bits that are not holy.

The social conditions idea of God but does not produce it (feudal ~ hierarchical etc) Man’s concerns drives him towards Polytheism, the absoluteness he experiences drives him towards Monotheism. So polytheism is not belief in many but lack of unity, demonic is when one claims absoluteness.

A Personal God indicates the concreteness of man’s ultimate concern.

Chapter X: The Actuality of God as Being and Living

“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. They place him on the level of other beings while elevating him above all of them.” (p261)

So we could refer to ‘being-itself’ or ‘ground of being’ – which points to the being inherent in everything. If God is not this he is subordinate to it. ‘He’ is beyond essence and existence, logically speaking God is prior to the split which characterises finite being. God is Being itself, not *a* being, which puts God above the transcendence/immanence debate since all beings are transcended by their creative ground.

The Thomist ‘proofs’ rely on affirming causality and then suddenly denying it, but ‘ground of being’ does not fall for this mistake. God is not subject to the structure of being, he is that structure.

Symbols: The statement ‘God is Being-itself’ is not symbolic but means what it says ~ God has actuality. After saying this nothing more can be said except symbolically. A Sign points *to*, but a Symbol participates in that of which it is a symbol – and does this by virtue of its being derived from Being-itself. Any concrete statement about God must be symbolic.

“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 is true if it adequately expresses the correlation of some person with final revelation .. The history of religion, right up to our own time, is full of dead symbols which have been killed not by a scientific criticism of assumed superstitions but by a religious criticism of religion.” (p 266) Symbols upon the divine for the human and the human for the divine ~ so if Father is employed as such a symbol for God, fatherhood then has sacramental depth; if God heals then that says healing has elements of the divine.

God as Living: Life is the becoming actual of potential being. OT’s anthropomorphism never allows YHWH to become a thing with others. But God cannot be called a ‘self’ since that would put him alongside other ‘selves’. To call God a ‘person’ is incorrect (not a person alongside other persons) but he is the ground of everything that is personal, so we may call God ‘Personal’, although it’s confusing term. God is principal of participation as its ground and participates in all that God creates – a ‘being with’ (which is symbolic language). To talk of God as ‘becoming’ is likewise not ontological but symbolic only.

God is spirit is the most embracing symbol since it includes within itself all ontological elements without contradiction. God as ‘Spirit’ (capital S) is used symbolically to apply spirit to divine life. Life as spirit transcends duality of body and mind, being itself the ground of both.

“God is Spirit, and any trinitarian statement must be derived from this basic assertion. God’s life is life as spirit, and the trinitarian principles are moments within the process of the divine life.” (p 277).

Logos is the principle of meaning and structure. The first principle (Being-itself) would be chaotic, demonic absolute, if it were not for Logos, the second principle.

Making Being-itself, now having meaning and structure, then, by virtue of *the third principle Spirit*, ‘goes out’ into creativity, based in the divine ground, it gives actuality to that which is potential and ‘outspoken’ in the divine Logos.

Chap XI

So the divine life becomes creative, actualising itself in inexhaustible abundance. The story of creation is not ‘once upon a time’ but a description of the world in relation to God. Genesis points to the situation of creatureliness and divine creativity.

Theodicy: Creation of creation of finite freedom – with its danger and greatness. But some beings excluded from any kind of fulfilment?? God creates the finite and so also ‘non-being, although it is eternally being conquered and reunited within the infinity of the divine life. “Therefore it is meaningful to speak of a participation of the divine life in the negativities of creaturely life. This is the ultimate answer to the question of theodicy.”

God's LOVE: Love can only be realised where there is full individualisation, yet the individual also longs to return to the unity to which he belongs by virtue of his ontological nature.

Love as *libido* is movement of needy towards that which fulfils the need.

Love as *philia* is the movement of the equal towards union with the equal.

Love as *eros* is the movement of that which is lower in power and meaning to that which is higher.

Love as *agape* affirms the other unconditionally; no one for whom a relation is technically possible is excluded, nor is anyone preferred. It is God bringing together everything into the unity of his life which has been disrupted or separated. Agape includes Justice, which acknowledges and preserves the freedom and the unique character of the beloved. Where this love is negated, God's power negates that negation – wrath – without which non-being would triumph over being. Retributive justice is that which surrenders to self-destruction that which resists love.

God as 'Father' and 'Lord'. Two main symbols of ego-thou relation.

God as Lord: includes King, Judge, Highest. Expressing the holy power of God, 1 the unapproachable majesty, 2 the Logos of meaning, which man sees as Law, and 3 the government of creature towards the final telos of fulfilment. Yet without the Father to balance this, then Lord becomes authoritarian tyrant.

God as Father: God is holy love and closeness and unity, while Lord represents distance. Father represents 1 God as ground of man's being, 2 God's sustaining and directing, 3 accepting man although unacceptable.

But the Father is also Lord or it would be a sentimental symbol, giving man whatever man wants and forgiving all who fancy it. But man can believe in forgiveness only if justice is maintained.

Remember that Lord and Father can be psychological stumbling blocks for many folk.

Other appellations of God as Being-itself may not involve the ego-thou relation. Can be: 'Almighty God' irresistible power of creativity, 'Eternal God' unchangeable ground of all life. In meditation we might contemplate the mystery.

VOLUME 2.

Vol 2, Chapters XII to XXI: Existence and The Christ:

NOTES ON VOL 2 ARE TO BE FOUND SEPARATELY.

NOTE: interesting point from intro to vol 2:

Is this 'Ground of Being' talk all abstraction? No, it is not the highest abstraction but the expression of the experience of being over against non-being. For some it is mostly the sound of the word 'being' which produces this concern of abstraction, but suprapersonal is not impersonal. It is the power of being in everything that has being!

This question is not asked in Eastern religious circles but is important to those who adopt Biblical base of faith. Biblical personalism vs. philosophical ontology. But there are no concepts or symbols in Bible which do not have ontological implications.

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Vol 2, III, ch XII: Existence and Existentialism: notes to be found separately.