

THE DOCTRINE OF
THE CHURCH IN
BARTH AND TILLICH

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This paper will present the main points in the doctrine of the Church in Karl Barth and Paul Tillich, and will discuss their respective strengths and weaknesses in an overall evaluation. We will begin with Tillich, who is more philosophical. The following material is taken from Systematic Theology, vol. III.

Tillich speaks of the Spiritual Presence as preparing mankind for its central manifestation in Christ and for the manifestation of the Spiritual Community, which was latent before Christ. This latter is the body of Christ, not the "church," a term used in the frame of the ambiguities of religion (p. 149). The Spiritual Community is unambiguous, but fragmentary, appearing under conditions of finitude, but conquering estrangement and ambiguity. Only the eyes of faith can discern this, however.

The creation of the Spiritual Community is typified by Pentecost's ecstasy, love in service, unity and universality. The church represents the Spiritual Community as its manifest religious self-expression, but non-churches are not excluded from the latter. The faith and love of Christ, as ultimate criterion and principle of resistance of the demonic, is known only by the church. However, it*is the actualization and distortion of the Spiritual Community.

The Spiritual Community participates in divine life and gives holiness to the churches. Agape unites the separate centers, which can stand the diversity of qualities of love. The Spiritual Community has no religious function; all acts are *i.e., the church.

grasped by the Spiritual Presence. There are no external religious commands, but morality is theonomous there, having as its source essential being. The motivating power is grace, not law. But this unity of religion and morality is fragmentary. The content of the moral imperative is a product of culture. Such are the ethics of the Kingdom of God.

As the body of Christ, the Spiritual Community is the Church invisible (with the Reformers), not a group apart, but the power and structure inherent in such groups. If these are conscious, they are a church. The overall unity of the local assemblies is the Church Universal. The Spiritual Community, which is their inner telos, determines their existence and is resisted by them. The holiness of the churches and of Christians is not empirical, but requires faith to be seen. Generic to ^{their} holiness is having the principle of reform within themselves, being under the cross. The unity of the churches depends on their foundation, the New Being. It is universal, open to all.

The Spiritual Community is the dynamic essence of the churches in which faith and love conquer ambiguity in principle. The churches affirm Jesus is the Christ; a member is someone with a serious desire to participate in the life of a group based on New Being as it has appeared in Christ. A church decides in concrete situations the relation of the community of faith to credal expressions. The distance between the divine and the human undercuts absolute claims; this is the Protestant principle (which must not neglect the Catholic substance). But churches must base their preaching on particular traditions. The Roman

church has lost the prophetic freedom of self-criticism, which the Protestant churches recover again and again.

The church cannot impose love ideologically, but neither can it tolerate inhuman inequality. It can judge in the name of the Spiritual Community, but it would violate the Protestant principle to excommunicate, putting oneself between God and man. Judgment is for the sake of reuniting, not cutting-off. The Protestant minister, unlike the Catholic priest, is not taboo, and finds it difficult to criticize powerful members. One is a full member of a particular church if he accepts the creed and order of that church; one can also be a guest, or remain in the latency of the Spiritual Community (as are Jews). Fanaticism is fear of the demonic produced by anxiety.

There are three groups of church functions: constitution (aimed at foundations), expansion (due to the universal claim) and construction (the actualizing of Spiritual potentialities). The polarities of constitution are tradition/reformation; of expansion, verity/adaptation; and of construction, form-transcendence/form-affirmation. There are also dangers to each of demonic hubris, absolutism and repression, respectively, and of emptying criticism, relativization and formalism, respectively.

Tradition is the link; the church takes material which affirms and transcends cultural forms. Aesthetic^{and cognitive} rules must be obeyed. No specific form of institution necessarily follows from the church. The first constitutive function of the church is to receive, to respond in worship, so there can be no mediating hierarchy which gives to the receiving others. The church

cannot avoid expressing its creed in every liturgical act.

The purpose of expansion through missions is to actualize the Spiritual Community in concrete churches all over. There is no abstract Christian message, so it is hard to avoid cultural imposition. Through education new generations are introduced into the reality of the Spiritual Community. Evangelism is directed at the church's estranged or indifferent members. Practical apologetics is the art of answering questions about its nature. Two principles apply to religious art: consecration (application of form-transcendence) and honesty (form-affirmation). The most suitable style is the expressionistic. Protestants are iconoclastic and prize music; lack of visual art is regrettable.

Theology interprets the church's symbols and relates them to the categories of knowledge, analyzing the form in which the substance is grasped. This is the discursive element. There is the meditative element, which penetrates the substance of religious symbols. Theoria comprises the aesthetic and the cognitive; praxis the personal and the communal. Questions relevant to praxis are whether the community can maintain justice and, the personality, humanity. The ambiguities of communal life are ^{those of} inclusive-ness, equality, leadership and legal form. Church office is not a divine command, but according to expediency and human wisdom. Saintliness is the transparency of the divine. Asceticism may take the form of discipline in order to accomplish creative work. The churches are related to other social groups by silent interpenetration (priestly function), critical judgment (prophetic) and political establishment (royal function, church leaders

influencing other leaders to allow the church to exercise the priestly and prophetic functions, but done under the sign of the cross, excluding certain means). All believers are priests; infant baptism reflects the fact that there is no one moment when one is spiritually mature. Conversion is a long process.

The purpose of the law is to guide the Christian to perfection (Calvin), while Lutheranism emphasizes the paradoxical character of the Christian life's ups and downs, with a deep understanding of the demonic. The church is not the answer to culture, but is itself cultural. The Spirit is not bound to it. Three principles are applicable: consecration of the secular, convergence of the holy and the secular and the essential belongingness of religion and culture to each other. Culture, under the impact of the Spiritual Presence, becomes theonomous, not religious. The Spiritual Presence can grasp through every use of language, overcoming its ambiguities. It can also overcome the ambiguities of knowledge by overcoming the subject-object disjunction; observation is replaced by participation. Religious knowledge is of the particular in light of the eternal. The function of the church is to transform all culture into theonomy. This is something the other parts of the Spiritual Community are doing also; when they realize what they are, they will become churches, too.

BARTH

The following material is taken from vol. IV/1-3.

The Church is the earthly-historical form of existence of the body of Christ, which also has a heavenly form of existence.

The history of the Church is enclosed and exemplified in Christ, i.e., is still hidden. The Church is when God lets certain men be his servants ("men"=persons). The Church is visible and invisible, and develops according to its own laws. Its glory will be hidden until the end. The Church is distinguished by its acknowledgement of what God has done for all in Christ. It publishes the union of all in Christ. The one Church has two forms: Israel, which attests justification as terminus a quo, and the Church, which attests justification ad quem; these are two economies of grace, but one history, with Christ the center of it. In a given locality there is a complete community, or Church. Its one foundation guarantees its unity (Christ is the foundation, forming the Church in the power of the Spirit). There is no Church government in the New Testament superior to the individual community; a Church should abandon the claim to be the only true one. Salvation is not limited to the Church; God may have provided other ways. The Church is indestructible, it cannot cease to be Christ's body. But it is ecclesia semper reformanda. One must criticize mildly, only Christ can condemn. There is no Church discipline; we can only believe the others in this societas mixta to be true members. The Church is catholic, its essence cannot alter, and it is ecumenical, comprehensive. Progress of the Church is doubtful. Something is always lacking in the Church's expression of itself. The Church is apostolic; this is its concrete spiritual criterion, an event in whose movement one must put oneself to decide. There are no historical or juridical grounds, the Holy Spirit is not controlled by a rite.

Christ built his Church on the apostles, and still does. He himself was a servant. In the apostles, the Church is confronted with the Old Testament prophets. Church government should be loose; Christ himself came only to exercise the ministry of herald.

This is the time of the Church, between parousias. The Church already knows what others do not: God has already reconciled the world and executed judgment. It is the provisional representation of all humanity as justified in Christ. The Church is given time to gather all. All has been done, nothing is lacking in intensive power, but it is in scope. At the end, the Church will have rendered its service. (IV/1:643-739.)

Christ builds up the Christian community with the power of the Holy Spirit, which shines through its sinfulness. The true Church is savingly necessary (IV/2:621). Its characteristic sin is trying to represent itself, forgetting its provisional existence. God does not act directly without his people. The complete man is Christ with his body. The community will embrace the cosmos. The community is eternal. Its upbuilding is always fresh, constantly corrected by the apostles' instructions. The hierarchy is flexible. There is no abstract Christian ethics; they are for the upbuilding of the community. The first locus is worship, where it is visible and decides how it will edify elsewhere. It is a community of saints and sinners. The Holy Spirit causes the Church to grow. The only content of the Holy Spirit is Christ. Jesus Christ is the community, but the community is not Jesus Christ. The kingdom of God is the rule of

God as it takes place in Jesus. The Church is not the kingdom until the kingdom encounters it. But the kingdom is already here in the community in the guise of the new humanity, and it grows. Only with the community is Christ the complete man. The Church is light shining in the darkness. Dangers beset it: restriction of growth, alienation, self-glorification, ideologization, but it will not be destroyed, for an element resists alienation (whence reform). There is order in the Church, and law, especially in public worship; there is discipline (vs. above, IV/1:698) regarding the unity of the congregation and its relation to the state. Details are worked out in canon law, which reflects Jesus as the primary acting subject and Scripture as the norm of law. The New Testament is not the model. The law is of service, all must serve. Canon law determines who is qualified to serve in a given capacity. Only in the Sabbath does the Church exist in true form. Church law is ordered by divine service. There is confession, baptism, the Lord's Supper and prayer, and singing. The power of canon law is in the confidence and obedience of those concerned. The law is human. It has a relative advantage vis-à-vis other laws in that it recognizes the lordship of Christ and that it is not qualified to be the subject of law. Its law should remind of the kingdom of God. (IV/2:614-726.)

The community knows the final meaning of history, its future manifestation already here as hope. It is part of salvation history, proclaiming that human confusion is not the final meaning of world-occurrence; God's providence is higher. This view is given to the Church, set at a place in which to see

Jesus at God's right, and the confusion of the world. All becomes relative to Christ; its true meaning is the empty tomb. The Church sees no more, but sees differently, it sees the new man. The Church must erect signs and work to be visible; at the end it will be manifest in its worldliness. Christ controls its being, but its essence is not Christ, only his body. It is totally free from and dependent on the environment, as was the true God and true man. It has a prophetic task in which it avails itself of human language given a new capability. There is no distinct social form for the Church; the criterion is whether the Word is honored.

The Church does not live by the forces of creation, but owes its existence to the divine act of reconciliation. It belongs to the order of grace, but has been established within the order of nature for its restoration. The Church exists as Jesus calls it with the power of the Word; Jesus exists secondarily, not exclusively, as his community exists. The unity of its being with Christ is its basis and secret. The community is the fellowship where it is given to men to know the world as it is. It must be worldly, it has an irresistible impulse toward the outside. Its task is its foundation, its history is measured by it; the Gospel is the content of its task, or Jesus. Its task is man, to whom it brings the kerygma of joy. Like God, the Church must see man as within, not as Godless, but considered in Christ. The Church always receives the Gospel anew, and must strive to hear it. It must not treat the Gospel as well-known or try to be relevant by patronizing man or a picture of him. The community

and humanity are a differentiated but integrated whole; it would be lost without humanity, but not vice-versa; the community is only relatively necessary (IV/3:826). Only the Holy Spirit leads man to God, the Church exercises only a ministry of reconciliation, declaring the Gospel, explaining what it attests and indicating the kingdom as a likeness. The community cannot create this knowledge, but only set others on the way to it. There are no answers except to the questions raised by the Gospel, since man does not really know himself (man as seen by God is not the man of social science). There are special callings and gifts, though all should seek one mind, serving each other. Speech precedes action. There are special ministries: praise, especially singing; explicit proclamation or preaching, which is the event in which Christ summons ~~afresh~~ ^{afresh}. The Church is also a school, and it evangelizes (home missions, to awaken the sleeping Church); there are also foreign missions, in which the Gospel should be opposed to all religions, seeking no point of contact; the Jews are a special case; they should be confronted with the fulfilled Word and made jealous and shown that Jesus is the Messiah. Theology is a critical account to itself and the world of the appropriateness of the Church's acts; good dogmatics is the only possible apologetics; there is prayer, thanksgiving, intercession; cure of souls, concerning the totality of the human being, and including confession of sins and amendment; there are personal examples as event, not program; the diaconate regards material distress; there is prophetic action, perceiving events and relating Church history and the world to the coming of the kingdom;

it is the highest gift, has the Old Testament for model and is a special, newly clear declaration of the Word. The Church should be ahead of its time in such perception of the old as perishing; there is conflict in the command to advance. Finally, the Church establishes fellowship. The Trinity is attested, Christ has a body, God is with the world. Unity must be aimed at; the Lord's Supper is the prototype of the end of conflict. (IV/3:681-762.)

In I/1:3-124, Barth made the following points: the sacraments are signs appointed by God to help us understand the Word, which for Evangelicals is first and can stand alone. Church proclamation cannot ask itself whether it is meeting the demands of culture. The Church must first do its own task, then go outside, but proclamation is intermediary between Scripture and particular situations. The Evangelical does not deprive human authority in the Church of its humanness. There are no irrefutable definitions. The Church is in Christ, but Christ is not in the Church. The Church needs writings (Scripture) so that it is not left to itself, but is confronted by an outside authority. Proclamation is God-service, the object of dogmatics.

EVALUATION AND COMMENTARY

We find that in concrete dogmatic points there is great agreement between Barth and Tillich in the doctrine of the Church. Both consider it as a creation of God in which people explicitly recognize the lordship of Christ; both would admit -- Barth less emphatically-- that God is not bound to the Church, but can act in many different ways. Both acknowledge the ambiguities of Christian life in the Church, the temptation to sin

that is ever-present, but also that element of reform which can never be lost, at least in churches under the Protestant principle; there is some question whether the Roman church has not so usurped spiritual authority so as to not be able to prophetically criticize itself. Both theologians are in the Protestant tradition in considering the word as above the sacrament, giving religious life a more intellectual character. Both are in great concordance in their views of church functions, the main difference being Tillich's emphasis on the aesthetic and Barth's on service (diaconate).

The main difference between the two thinkers is probably in their starting points and perspectives, ^{leading to} ~~great~~ differences of style and concrete content (as opposed to more abstract, systematic content, in which there is great agreement, as has been said). Tillich has a very universal world-view in which the pervasiveness of God's, or the Spirit's, action, is ever-present on his mind. He takes into account all that is happening in the world, and can only consider the Christ-event, and the history of Israel, within this wide context. Barth himself refers to this wider history, but emphatically only as the frame for revelation-history proper. Tillich is also very appreciative of culture, of what man is and does, and cannot disregard it as of little value for theology. The total man and his world must be thought about, and this results in the method of correlation, in which the answers from God correspond to real questions asked by mankind. These questions and predicament are in the form of need, but they are the real counterpart to the divine word,

something really supplied by man to the dialogue.

Barth, on the other hand, starts off not only from Scripture, but from a certain absolutizing of the distance between the divine and the human. By "distance" I mean his attack on the analogia entis, wherein the human can offer little clues, or none, regarding the ways of God, who then enters in on the human scene as totally alien. This can only be a reaction against the corrupt institutionalization of the divine by the Roman church. Barth's protest is well-taken, but he 'protests too much.' Theoretically, he will say that we must approach other men not as strangers to God, but as already accepted by him. But he will be against seeking points of contact with other religions. It seems as if he can only accept the human link to God only in the person of Christ, the God-man. He manifests a definite separation between what God reveals and what he created, not all of which has turned away from him in sin, but much of which has humbly sought him as the 'unknown God.' Barth's thoughts are very clear at the Christological level, but, concretely, many of his words do not constitute a rapprochement with the rest of mankind. He divides too much the natural from the supernatural spheres in his effort to free the Word from human contraptions. Thus he minimizes the sacraments, preferring to depend more on a more intellectual, or "spiritual" as opposed to bodily, transmission of revelation. He thinks that visual or audile stimuli interfere with the Word; this indicates his separation of creation, which loses its integrity. However, although Barth does exaggerate, he does not go beyond certain acceptable limits within orthodoxy.

The most unfortunate consequence, however, and not by any means his fault, is the resulting division in the Church, for which both sides are to blame.

The negative aspect of Tillich's theology is its vagueness and lack of biblical flavor. Again, it can be said that at an abstract level his theology is sound, but concretely his doctrine of the church seems more like a generally-applicable description. One could say that he covers it all, but its lack of familiar and pregnant theological vocabulary, along with abstract style, makes one read him as if he were talking about an abstract entity, not the body of Christ --which, indeed, according to him the church is not. We are then referred to the "Spiritual Community," and one gets the distinct impression that the core of what he is writing about is not the church and not theology, but a philosophy of God's action in nature. Then Barth's remark about the "bloodless thinker," cruel as it is, seems somewhat justified.

Karl Barth, however, is steeped in the Bible, and all his writing and thinking is deeply biblical. For those of us who highly value Sacred Scripture and give it a unique place in revelation, Barth can only be admirable, and a sure guide in theology, since what he says derives from a sincere effort --barring the caveats mentioned above-- to listen to and propound the Word of God as attested by Scripture. He may be at times too slavish a follower of the text and too unaccepting of the value of tradition, but there is a freshness and independence in him that makes his writing both familiar and new, and trustworthy. One weak point is his minimizing of human organization in the

Church, in the sense of world-wide body with a long history. I would disagree with the view that one local congregation can be a complete church, or that there was no church government in the New Testament superior to the local community. The body of Christ is related in different ways to its different members, and there can be no independence among them. Another weak point is the minimization of the sacraments and physical expression in the Church. This is surprising in view of his high regard for worship, which is unnecessarily truncated.

Overall, however, we find great value in Barth's doctrine of the Church. Unlike Tillich, who does not convey a concrete idea of the Church, Barth follows the creed, familiar to all. Reference is made to the apostles and to the Holy Spirit's action in the Church. Much reference is made to reconciliation in Jesus Christ, to the cross and to the kingdom. The point is made that the Church, like Christ, must look beyond itself and serve as a herald. This concrete emphasis on service results in a difference regarding Tillich, the mention of diakonia. In keeping close to biblical tradition, Barth is mindful of the prophets in their concrete activity, denouncing injustice and announcing salvation. This shows that in theology there is no substitute for a real immersion in Scripture, no substitute for most if not all of the biblical categories and concerns. In some way the questions man asks are asked, by man, in the Bible. The Bible is a very human book. So it seems that Tillich may be guilty of taking the Bible as too well-known, an object to be deepened and adapted to the age, while Barth listens to it ever anew.

Good summary of Barth & Tillich (Claver
with Church; but since you cover everything, it
is sketchy. Also a good evaluation & comparison
of their doctrines. It would have helped you
paper to expand on those & perhaps focus the
summaries on central matters. I think Tillich's
advantage over Barth is that he gives the complete
cultural setting of the church & its functions,
whereas Barth does not. Barth's value is his
theological concentration.

Thanks for your participation

Paper & exam. (B+)

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