Mission Theology and Interreligious Encounter: 1910–2010

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Introduction: Edinburgh 1910—The Christian Century

The Edinburgh Mission Conference of 1910, held at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, was a watershed in the history of Christian missions and marked the beginning of a century of vigorous mission activity, first among Protestant Christians, and then also among Roman Catholics and the Orthodox as well. From the perspective of the missionaries who gathered in Edinburgh a century ago, the state of human culture globally was ripe to hear the Christian Gospel, perhaps especially those who belonged to non-Christian religious traditions. Eight commissions tackled the challenges faced by Christian missionaries in the field. The evangelistic zeal that marked the culture of the missionary enterprise of the era is apparent in title of the flagship commission: "Carrying the Gospel to All the Non-Christian World." The commission entitled "The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions" took a more thoughtful tone, but the commission report was still in the vein of understanding how Christianity fulfilled other religions. The intra-Christian dynamics that might have inhibited the effective spreading of the gospel as it was understood at the time served as the initial impulse for the formation of the ecumenical movement, later institutionalized in the World Council of Churches. Indeed, the twentieth century was to have been the "Christian century," and in some respects it was.[1]

In 2010, in celebration of the centenary of the 1910 Edinburgh conference, four international conferences were organized to review the mission history of the last century, to take stock of the current mission situation, and to vision the next century of mission. Much has changed about the theological vision and culture surrounding the practice of Christian missions over the past 100 years. On the one hand, missionaries were responsible for or at least complicit in some of the worst cultural and human abuses brought about by colonial imperialism. On the other hand, missionaries were responsible for some of the most careful, reflective, and caring engagements across boundaries of language, culture, and race ever seen in the course of human history. In the maelstrom of a process that was the reality of the twentieth century mission movement, Christian mission had to be theologically rethought and practically redeveloped.[2] It may be thought that this recasting of mission was primarily brought about in the face of external criticism, but the truth of the matter is that the vast majority of the most searing critiques of mission came from missionaries themselves. In the midst of the voices coming out of the four centenary conferences, this paper seeks to make a contribution to the theological reconception of mission for the twenty-first century in conversation with Paul Tillich, whose theological vision was both influenced by and radically divergent from the mission paradigms of the Edinburgh Mission Conference.

The Mission Theology of Paul Tillich

Almost fifty years after the Edinburgh Conference, the same enthusiasm for Christian mission continued unabated, although the experience of the Holocaust was beginning to temper some of the evangelistic zeal. Paul Tillich's March 4, 1955 article for *Christianity and Crisis*, entitled "The Theology of Missions,"[3] exemplifies the view that mission is at the heart of Christian faith and life and that it has something inherently positive to offer the world.

> Missions is that activity by the Church by which it works for the transformation of its own latency into its own manifestation all over the world… Missions is not a cultural function; it is rather the function of the Church to spread all over the world… Missions is rather the attempt to transform the latent Church into something new, namely, the New Reality in Jesus as the Christ. Transformation is the meaning of missions.[4]

For Tillich, the transformation at the heart of the mission enterprise is ongoing throughout history, in which the full realization of the Kingdom of God, which he indicates is the symbol of the fulfillment of history, is never fully manifest.

History has a tragic ambiguity; but the Kingdom of God is the symbol for an unambiguous situation, a purification of history, something in which the demonic is conquered, the fulfillment is reached, and the ambiguous is thrown out.[5] The Church, which is the symbol of the Kingdom of God in history, is always a mixture of the latent church and the manifest church, which is the church embodying the New Being in Christ. The work of mission is the work that

participates in the transformation from latency to manifestation.

Missionary work is that work in which the potential universality of Christianity becomes evident day by day, in which the universality is actualized with every new success of the missionary endeavor.[6] Universality is central to Tillich's conception of the New Being. He acknowledges that his use of the term "universality" in connection with Christianity is continuous with the discussions of the absoluteness of Christianity in liberal theology. He modifies the discussion of absoluteness, however, by insisting that the universality of Christianity is not something that can be proved theoretically *a priori*. It is something that can only be known pragmatically *a posteriori*. The work of missions is not to make Christianity universal but to reveal the potential universality of Christianity already at work. Furthermore, since Tillich is committed to the view that the Kingdom of God is never fully manifest in history, but is always mixed with at least some latency, the work of missions is never done: "if you are in the historical situation in which missions are, then you offer a continuous proof, a proof which is never finished."[7]

The topic of Christian mission is broached again in Tillich's *Systematic Theology*, Volume III, in his discussion of the Holy Spirit and the church. In the context of his discussion of "the functions of the churches, their ambiguities, and the Spiritual Community," Tillich specifically locates the work of mission in the second of three functions of the churches: constitution, expansion, and construction. The functions are correlated with three polarities that serve to describe the ambiguity inherent in each function. The polarity in the function of constitution is tradition and reformation; that of expansion is verity and adaptation; that of construction is form-transcendence and form-affirmation. The functions of expansion are those that Tillich identifies with mission, with their correlated polarity of verity and adaptation defining the ambiguity inherent in expansion. The danger of verity is absolutism while that of adaptation is relativism. The question of the function of expansion for the churches is how to navigate between the absolutism that led to an ethos of colonial imperialism in mission and the relativism that would disprove the universality of the New Being in Christ.[8]

It is likely shocking to some that thus far Tillich's theology of missions does not seem to be too terribly far away from the mission vision advanced by the 1910 Edinburgh conference. (This would be a special shock to those surprised to find that Tillich had a theology of missions *at all*!) To be sure, he explicitly discouraged his readers from interpreting mission as "an attempt to save from eternal damnation as many individuals as possible from among the nations of the world." But, he also rejected the notions from liberal theology that mission is "a cross-fertilization of cultures" because doing so neglects the universality of the church and thus its necessary growth; or that mission is about unifying religions because this would deny that the church is the agency of the Kingdom of God. At times, Tillich can be outright triumphalistic:

> The element of faith is always present, and faith is a risk. But a risk must be justified, and that is what missions does. It shows that Jesus as the Christ and the New Being in him has the power to conquer the world. In conquering the world, missions is the continuous pragmatic test of the universality of the Christ, of the truth of the Christian assertion that Jesus is the Christ.[9]

But that triumphalism seems to sit uneasily with his condemnation of the "unconscious arrogance that assumes that Christianity, as it has developed in the Western world, is the reality of the New Being in Christ."[10] To understand how Tillich is able to hold such disparate claims together in a coherent, consistent, adequate, and applicable framework, we must first take a brief detour through his theology of culture and theory of symbolic religious language.

Theology of Culture and Symbolic Religious Language

Tillich was a prophet of the theology of culture. This arose from his existential approach to religion, one consequence of which is that "religion as ultimate concern is the meaning-giving substance of culture, and culture is the totality of forms in which the basic concern of religion expresses itself. In abbreviation: religion is the substance of culture, culture is the form of religion."[11] The existential approach itself consists in the claim that "if we look at the human spirit from a special point of view, it presents itself to us as religious… Religion is not a special function of man's spiritual life, but it is the dimension of depth in all of its functions."[12] This depth dimension in spiritual life signifies "being ultimately concerned about that which is and should be our ultimate concern. This means that faith is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern."[13] The resulting intimate binding of religion and culture, of sa-

cred and secular, means that there is no escape from religion in Tillich's view. Ultimate concern is to Tillich very much what the feeling of absolute dependence is for Schleiermacher.[14] Furthermore, anyone who participates in a culture, which is everyone, has a religion as the substance of that culture.

These ideas are at the heart of Tillich's theological project, but they bear review here because of the fact that Tillich understands language to be a cultural artifact.[15] The implications for religious language are especially important.

No sacred language has fallen from a supranatural heaven and placed between the covers of a book. But, there is human language, based on man's encounter with reality, changing through the millennia, used for the needs of daily life, for expression and communication, for literature and poetry, and used also for the expression and communication of our ultimate concern.[16] "Religious language is ordinary language," and is, therefore, just as much a cultural artifact as ordinary language. Any language that gives voice to the depth dimension of life in a culture is the religious language of that culture, given the unity of religion and culture effected above.

Not only is religious language a cultural artifact, it is also symbolic. Tillich is famous for saying that the only non-symbolic statement about God is that God is being-itself or ground of being.[17] All other theological language is symbolic, which is to say that like a sign: it points beyond itself, but unlike a sign, it participates in the reality and power of that to which it points. Unlike a sign, a symbol cannot be replaced with any other symbol. Symbols are compelling and have influence over those who employ them because of their participation in the reality and power of that to which they point.[18] At the end of his consideration of the work of symbols, Tillich makes a move that prefigures the work Peter Berger would do in *The Sacred Canopy*[19] a decade later:

> "Out of what womb are symbols born?" Out of the womb which is usually called today the "group unconscious" or "collective unconscious" … It is not invented intentionally; and even if somebody would try to invent a symbol, as sometimes happens, then it becomes a symbol only if the unconscious of a group says "yes" to it. It means that something is opened up by it…Now this implies further that in the moment in which this inner situation of the human group to a symbol has ceased to exist, then the symbol dies. The symbol does not "say" anything any more.[20]

In the language of the theology of culture, a religious symbol ceases to speak when it no longer evokes the depth dimension of life. The implication of the fact that language is a cultural artifact amidst all of this is that different words may function as different symbols within particular cultures.

These considerations become helpful in interpreting Tillich's understanding of the work of the theologian. This is most clearly stated at the outset of *Systematic Theology*, Volume I.

> While the philosopher of religion tries to remain general and abstract in his concepts, as the concept "religion" itself indicates, the theologian is consciously and by intention specific and concrete… The theologian…claims the universal validity of the Christian message in spite of its concrete and special character. He does not justify this claim by abstracting from the concreteness of the message but by stressing its unrepeatable uniqueness.[21]

This is to say that the theologian is obligated to deploy the religious symbols of their culture in language. The irony here is that all of Tillich's talk about the existential approach to religion and relationship between religion and culture do not properly belong to theology because they do not deploy any religious symbols but instead seek to generalize and remain abstract. His book should have been titled *Philosophy of Culture*, not the *Theology of Culture*. In order for language actually to connect people with their ultimate concern, language must be symbolically connected to the reality of that which they take to be ultimate. This means that the theologian is obligated to discern what symbolic language is alive in a culture and deploy it. Failure to deploy the symbolic religious language of the culture is to abdicate the role of theologian.

Reinterpreting Tillich's Theology of Mission

It is extremely important to read Tillich's "The Theology of Missions" very carefully, in light of what we have just seen from the *Theology of Culture* and the *Systematic Theology*, if we are to understand his true meaning and the radical nature of his reinterpretation. "The Theology of Missions," unlike *Theology of Culture*, is properly titled. Tillich extravagantly deploys the Christian symbols to interpret the goals, objectives, and value of mission endeavors. As a theologian in the culture of the mid-

20th century America, just following World War II and the Shoah, and in the wake of the mission fervor evoked by the 1910 Edinburgh Mission Conference, Tillich was obligated to employ the symbolic religious language of Christianity, the religious language of this culture, to give theological answers to existential or philosophical questions.[22] "Theology is the methodical interpretation of the contents of the Christian faith."[23]

The questions to be answered here, then, are as follows: What are the Christian symbolic terms that Tillich is working with? What account does Tillich give of the realities and powers in which these symbols participate? Finally, how does the systematic ordering of the symbols evoke a novel perspective on the nature and work of mission? Thankfully, identifying the symbolic terms is relatively straightforward as Tillich usually capitalizes his theological symbolic terms. We begin by looking at the symbols and the nature of what Tillich identifies as the realities and powers in which they participate before turning to an analysis of their systematic deployment.

Tillich identifies two Christian symbols as central to the theology of missions. The first is the theological answer to the existential question, or the existential ambiguity of history, namely the Kingdom of God. "The Kingdom of God is a symbol for the unity of history in and above history."[24] This is to say that history is marked by the ambiguities of time, but that the Kingdom of God participates in the reality and power of eternity. In history, a continuous mixture of good and evil exists, in every group, in every agency that carries the historical process, in every period, in every historical actualization. History has a tragic ambiguity; but the Kingdom of God is the symbol for an unambiguous situation, a purification of history, something in which the demonic is conquered, the fulfillment is reached, and the ambiguous is thrown out. In this threefold sense, as fulfillment, unification, and purification of history, the Kingdom of God is the answer to the riddle of history.[25]

For Tillich, while the Kingdom of God transcends history, as its fulfillment, unification, and purification, it is also immanent within history in the second Christian symbol central to the theology of missions: the Church. The Christian Church, the embodiment of the New Being in community, represents the Kingdom of God in history. The Church itself is not the Kingdom of God, but it is its agent, its anticipation, and its fragmentary realization. It is fighting in history; and since it represents the Kingdom of God it can be distorted, but it can never be conquered.[26]

Tillich divides history into two sections around a center, the New Being in Jesus the Christ. The New Being in Jesus as the Christ is the full manifestation of the meaning of history, which is the Kingdom of God, the fulfillment, unification and purification of history. The period before the New Being is manifest is the period of the latent Church, while the period after the New Being is manifest is the period of the manifest Church. It is important to emphasize, however, that this interpretation of the center of history transcends history and is relative to history such that at any particular point in history some of the world is in latency and other parts are living in the period of the manifest Church. This is the content of the ambiguity of history. It is clear, then, that Tillich is not speaking of any institution or historical/sociological reality that might be identified as church. The Church as a symbolic religious term simply refers to anywhere that the New Being is made manifest. Irenaeus is famous for saying that wherever the Spirit is, there is the church. Tillich would say that wherever the New Being is manifest, there is the church.

Of course, Tillich has already introduced another symbolic religious term into the discussion, namely, the New Being in Jesus as the Christ. There is, however, something a little bit strange about this particular symbolic religious term. Certainly Jesus Christ is a central symbolic religious term in the culture out of which Tillich was theologizing. It is less clear that the New Being is such a symbolic religious term. It is certainly not a term that has come up often in the course of religious history. That said, it is a term that participates in the reality and power of the existentialist worldview so prevalent in Tillich's culture. Insofar as the term "New Being" gives voice to the depth dimension of life in an existentialist culture, it is in fact a legitimate symbolic religious term. It is important to note that in employing the term, Tillich is narrowing the scope of his public from his Christian culture more generally to the culture of Christian existentialism. This narrower scope of his public is an important part of what creates the ambivalence visible in what Tillich is doing in "The Theology of Missions."

There is something else strange about the symbolic religious term "the New Being in Jesus as the Christ." What is this "Jesus *as the* Christ?" Why does he not simply speak of Jesus Christ? By insert-

ing "as the" into the symbolic religious term "Jesus Christ," Tillich is able to employ Christ as a functional term referring to the New Being, and abstract it from the historical reality of the historical Jesus. Nevertheless, he is able to connect the New Being to the historical person of Jesus by acknowledging that the historical Jesus participates by functioning as the Christ. This is to say that the historical Jesus is not the fullness of the New Being in himself, but participates in the function of being Christ and so can serve as a symbol, potentially one among others, of the New Being. Whereas for Irenaeus, wherever the Spirit is, there is the church; so for Tillich, wherever the New Being is, there is the Christ.

We have already seen that for Tillich mission is the transformation of the latent Church into the manifest Church. The Church is the embodiment of the New Being in community, and the New Being is the manifestation of the Kingdom of God, the manifestation of the fulfillment, unification, and purification of history. Mission, then, is the transformation from the ambiguity of life and the human predicament, which in Tillich's existentialism is centrally defined by estrangement or standing out of essence, into the clarity brought about by a return to essence. "New Being is essential being under the conditions of existence, conquering the gap between essence and existence."[27] Now we have some language to understand what Tillich meant by the New Being in Jesus as the Christ conquering the world. This is not the cultural conquest of colonial imperialism but the spiritual conquest of estrangement. To be sure, the symbolic term "conquest" participates in the violent reality of war, but by participating in the reality and power of that violence it evokes the weight and depth and pain of the struggle to overcome alienation and estrangement to return to essence.

What gives rise to the sounding of triumphalism in Tillich's mission theology is his willingness to deploy the Christian symbols along traditional lines even as he is doing something radically different from what many Christians of his time and ours would understand those symbols to mean. Tillich was less concerned with clarity and precision than he was with getting the symbolic religious terms operating together coherently, consistently, and correlating to the existential/philosophical questions of his day. This means that Tillich has a higher tolerance for the symbols crashing around and into one another. He also understands symbols functioning at a higher level of abstraction than that at which they are typically deployed in much theological discourse. This abstraction is not the "method of abstraction," which he found odious,[28] but rather a movement from historical and sociological realities to ideal realities, à la Platonic ideas, which pull the symbols toward the universal, the tension between which and the concrete realities Tillich finds so fecund for theology.[29] Nevertheless, this understanding of symbol results in further confusion in attempting to interpret his mission theology, since the symbols are abstracted from historical, concrete realities toward the universal, instead of simply abiding in the messiness of historical concreteness. This move to abstraction brings us to our last section, in which I examine the meaning of Tillich's mission theology for interreligious encounter.

Mission Theology and Interreligious Encounter

The same abstraction from historical and sociological realities that led to confusion as to the perspective Tillich takes in his mission theology creates even greater confusion as to Tillich's perspective on other religions and interreligious encounter. Tillich claims that religion is the depth structure of human life. Christ is the New Being of that depth structure, and Christianity is the participation of the depth structure of human life in the New Being. Other religions, then, are the depth structure without the New Being. However, given the move to abstract from historical and sociological realities, Tillich allows no easy distinction into the categories of Christian, Jew, pagan, or humanist with respect to any given person or social group. It is important to understand what Tillich means by each of these symbolic terms.

What does Christianity mean if participation of the depth structure of human life in the New Being is not localized either in an individual or a group? When Tillich claims that, "there is always paganism, Judaism and humanism in the midst of the Christian nations themselves," he is not saying that pagan, Jewish and humanist minorities live in Christian majority countries. He is not making a sociological claim but a theological claim. Christianity is the spiritual lives of individual people and groups insofar as they participate in the New Being. "In some way and on some level, every human being is longing for a new reality in contrast to the distorted reality in which he is living."[30] This means that if we were to take any individual, a proportion of that person's spiritual life may participate in the New Being. Everyone is subject to some level of distortion, including manifest Christians. This is also why Chris-

tianity can only be universal in a pragmatic sense. Since the Kingdom of God is never fully realized in history, it will be never be the case that Christianity can be demonstrated to be universal with certainty in history. The reason that the Kingdom of God can never be fully realized in history is that historical life is ambiguous, and even spiritual life that participates in the New Being is still a mixture of essence and existence.

Just as Christianity is abstracted from all social and historical realities, so too is paganism. For Tillich, paganism is the symbol of any person or group of people that for one reason or another is not in a position yet to participate in the New Being. People are not outside of God; they are grasped by God, on the level in which they can be grasped—in their experience of the Divine, in the realm of holiness in which they are living, in which they are educated, in which they have performed acts of faith and adoration and prayer and cult, even if the symbols in which the Holy was expressed seem to us extremely primitive and idolatrous.[31] Paganism is thus a symbol for the latent Church generally.

Judaism for Tillich is also the latent Church, in a state of preparation for the New Being. All that was said of paganism is true also for Judaism. But there is something special about Judaism. The Jews have an everlasting function in history. "Ever" means as long as there is still history, and, therefore, paganism. The function of Judaism would be to criticize, in the power of the prophetic spirit, those tendencies in Christianity that drive toward paganism and idolatry.[32]

Tillich is not confident on this point, but he seems to be suggesting that Judaism may be necessary for the success of Christian missions and Christianity in general in order to avoid falling back into the latent church. For Tillich, the proper mode of interaction with Jews is to "subject ourselves as Christians to the criticism of their prophetic tradition."[33]

The last tradition Tillich engages in "The Theology of Missions" is humanism, which is also the latent Church. However, just as the function of Judaism in history is to prophetically urge Christianity on into becoming ever more the manifest Church, the function of humanism is to offer criticism of the manifest Church.

There are many people who are critical of Church, Christianity, and religion generally. Many times, this criticism comes from the latent Church, directed against the manifest Church, and is often effected through the power of principles which belong to, and should be effective in, the manifest Church itself.[34]

Tillich goes on to suggest that the proffering of criticism is a sign of a "hidden desire" to become part of the manifest church. "This can happen, however, only if the manifest Church accepts the criticism which comes from the latent Church."[35] This is to say that Christianity must always humbly acknowledge that even as it strives to become ever more the New Being, it is always becoming so in the context of estranged existence, which always requires further purification. The work of humanism is to remind Christianity of the principles of life in the New Being that it sometimes forgets and can only be reminded of from the outside. Once again, Christianity requires humanism in order to be Christian.

The fact that for Tillich none of these traditions is bound by sociological or historical boundaries means that not all of those who call themselves Christians are Christians, and that some who call themselves Buddhists or Hindus or Muslims or Jews or atheists or agnostics might in fact be Christians. For Irenaeus, wherever the Spirit is, there is the church; so for Tillich, wherever the New Being is, there is the Christ, and wherever the New Being is manifest, there is the Church. This is something like what Martin Luther King, Jr., conveyed in his 1959 Palm Sunday Sermon in which he eulogizes Mohandas Gandhi and credits Gandhi with greater works than Jesus Christ. As we conclude, let us consider what Tillich's mission theology might have to offer for interreligious encounter and mission in the twenty-first century.

Conclusion: 2010—A Future of Mission and Interreligious Encounter

Now, in 2010, a century of Christian missions has past. Furthermore, the global religious landscape has changed significantly, or at least attention to continuous change has been drawn. As a sociological reality, the center of gravity of global Christianity has shifted from southern Spain to Timbuktu, as described in the recently released *Atlas of Global Christianity*.[36] From his 1955 article, it seems that Tillich would have been neither surprised nor particularly alarmed by this development, and certainly not to the extent of the anxiety that many western theologians and ecclesiasts, who claim to follow in his footsteps, seem to experience. Indeed, Tillich's mission theology prophetically announces the rising

global church in which the New Being in Christ has been latent but is being made manifest, not according to western designs and schemes, but according to the dialectics of the cultures in which they arise.

There is also a mission to the Christians by those non-Christians to whom Christian missions are addressed. What Christian missions have to offer is not Christianity—certainly not American, German, or British Christianity—but the message of Jesus as the Christ, as the New Being. It is the message about Jesus as the center of history that, day by day, is confirmed by missions. It is not, however, Christianity as an historical reality that is this center of history.[37] Tillich acknowledges that independence is developmental, but sees the global church as a check on western arrogance.

In the *Theology of Culture*, Tillich addresses the issue of religious language and comes down strongly on the side of doing exactly what he did in "The Theology of Missions," actually employing the symbolic language of religion. In this way, Tillich's theology of culture offers a helpful corrective to the struggles in many of the discussions of interreligious dialogue, theology of religions, and comparative theology today that attempt to ameliorate the conflicts among religious symbols when religious people interact. Tillich would have been strongly opposed to methods that deny religious symbols, instead asking those who participate in interreligious encounter to bring their symbols with them and let them "crash around and break."

Nevertheless, as Tillich points out, there are also points at which symbols no longer refer, at which they die. It seems to me that this is the case with the symbols of Christianity, paganism, Judaism, and humanism as Tillich deploys them. His move to abstraction, while enabling him to be deferential to and critical of these traditions in novel ways, is inappropriate in an age of extreme religious pluralism and religious violence where confusion as to the meaning of these identity markers could actually have life or death consequences. That said, his move to abstraction does point us toward three important values for interreligious engagement.

First, Tillich's move to abstraction points toward the value of humility in interreligious encounter. By defining Christianity as the manifestation of the New Being, and also insisting that the New Being in history is always under the historical conditions of existence estranged from essence, Tillich is building a particular type of humble fallibilism into his theology. He indicates this in defining the missiological enterprise as fundamentally a pragmatic proof of the universality of Christianity. The capacity to acknowledge that the pursuit of the Kingdom of God is never fully realized in history characterizes Tillich's humble fallibilism with an imperfectionism that breeds humility. It is out of this groundwork of humility that the other two values emerge.

The second virtue in Tillich's move to abstraction is vulnerability. It was the early American pragmatists, including Charles Sanders Peirce and John Dewey, who drew the conclusion that fallibilism requires a method of inquiry that makes its conclusions vulnerable to correction. Tillich builds this into the mission enterprise in the engagement of Christian missions with other religions. In fact, Tillich pushes the need for vulnerability to the extreme. He goes so far as to claim that Christianity truly needs other religions in order to be Christianity in the context of the historical situation. Furthermore, the universality of the New Being is not a foregone conclusion but a reality to be discovered and made manifest in the process of mission. Because the answer "the New Being" is given to the question of existence, understanding of what it means to participate in the New Being may change as deeper understandings of the question of existence emerge. It is the New Being as the fulfillment, unification, and purification of existence returning to essence that Tillich believes mission may find to be universal. Thus, it is most crucial to make the New Being itself an idea in the minds of missionaries, vulnerable to correction.

Finally, Tillich's move to abstraction insists on deference to difference. Humble fallibilism and vulnerability to correction necessitate deference to those who may be in a position to improve the fullness of the manifestation of the New Being and our understanding of it. As my teacher, Robert Neville, likes to say, "it is important to work hard to have the best theory in the room, but if it turns out to be wrong, you should want to be the first to know about it." Tillich is clear that the work of missions is not only work internal to Christianity but also non-Christians may bear the missiological burden of transforming the latent Church into the manifest Church by bearing witness to the New Being, even from outside the manifest Church or in a state of latency.

As consideration of the work of mission in the next century moves forward out of the reflective and visionary processes of the four centenary conferences this year, Tillich has something to teach us about God, ourselves, and the ways we relate to one

another. Humility, vulnerability, and deference are not signs of weakness but signs of a great desire and courage to be and to participate in the New Being. Taking up the values of humility, vulnerability, and deference can unleash a creative semiosis, in which new symbols that participate in the power and reality of our ultimate concern make the New Being more and more manifest. We will never escape the ambiguous reality of existence in history estranged from essence. The New Being will never enact the fulfillment, unification, and purification of history within history. For that we must wait for the fullness of the Kingdom of God. What we can do is pursue the universality of the New Being and the transformation of ourselves and all creation from the old being toward participation in the New. We can be missionaries.

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[1] For a brief history of the 1910 Edinburgh Mission Conference and its significance, see Keneth R. Ross. *Edinburgh 2010: Springboard for Mission*. (Pasadena: William Carey International University Press, 2010): 1-18.

[2] David J. Bosch. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991).

[3] Paul Tillich. "The Theology of Missions." *Christianity in Crisis*. 4 March 1955.
accessed via Religion Online. < http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=390>. 16 September 2010.

[4] ibid.

[5] ibid.

[6] ibid.

[7] ibid.

[8] Paul Tillich. *Systematic Theology*, Volume Three. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963): 182-88.

[9] Paul Tillich. "The Theology of Missions. op. cit.

[10] ibid.

[11] Paul Tillich. *Theology of Culture*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959): 42.

[12] ibid: 5.

[13] ibid: 40.

[14] Friedrich Schleiermacher. *The Christian Faith*. (London: T&T Clark, 1999): 5-18.

[15] Paul Tillich. *Theology of Culture*. op. cit.: 47-8. This is a controversial view from the perspective of linguistics, but one that gains credence in light of Terrance Deacon. *The Symbolic Species*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998).

[16] ibid: 47.

[17] Paul Tillich. *Systematic Theology*, Volume One. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951): 238-39. See also Paul Tillich. *Theology of Culture*. op. cit.: 61.

[18] Paul Tillich. *Theology of Culture*. op. cit.: 56-58.

[19] Peter Berger. *The Sacred Canopy*. (New York: Doubleday, 1967).

[20] Paul Tillich. *Theology of Culture*. op. cit.: 58.

[21] Paul Tillich. *Systematic Theology*, Volume One. op. cit.: 9-10.

[22] ibid: 59-66.

[23] ibid: 15.

[24] Paul Tillich. "The Theology of Missions." op. cit.

[25] ibid.

[26] ibid.

[27] Paul Tillich. *Systematic Theology*, Volume Two. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957): 118-19.

[28] Paul Tillich. *Systematic Theology*, Volume One. op. cit.: 107.

[29] ibid: 16-17, 211-35.

[30] Paul Tillich. "The Theology of Missions." op. cit.

[31] ibid.

[32] ibid.

[33] ibid.

[34] ibid.

[35] ibid.

[36] Todd Johnson and Kenneth Ross, eds. *An Atlas of Global Christianity*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

[37] Paul Tillich. "The Theology of Missions." op. cit.
