

PAUL TILLICH'S PROTESTANT PRINCIPLE

Brennan Hill

An understanding of Tillich's Protestant principle is crucial if one is to deal with this significant theologian's theology of culture. This "principle" is fundamental in Tillich's rejection of pure autonomy and heteronomy, as he moves toward the ideal in theonomy. The purpose of this article is first of all to define the principle and then locate and explain its main tenets: justification through faith; refusal to leave the boundary; resistance of dogma; support for theological development; and rooting authority in Grace. We will conclude with Tillich's remarks on the future significance of this principle.

A. Definition

The Protestant principle is "the theological expression of the true relation between the Unconditional and the conditioned or religiously speaking, between God and man."⁽¹⁾ It is a principle concerned with faith or the state of mind wherein one is grasped by the power of something Unconditional, something manifested to man as the ground and judge of his existence. The major objective of this principle is to insure that the power which grasps man's faith is not something finite posing as the Infinite. Rather, it insists that all finite things grasp man's faith by pointing beyond "their finite existence to the infinite, inexhaustible, and unapproachable depth of their being and meaning."⁽²⁾ Therefore, this principle stands in prophetic judgement against all idolatry, religious pride, ecclesiastical pride, and secular self-sufficiency. For Tillich, this principle is fundamental

BRENNAN HILL, Ph.D. Assistant Professor of Theology and Religious Education at Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio, U.S.A. Educated at St. Bonaventure University, Catholic University of America, Cambridge, and Marquette University. Ph.D. in Religious Studies from Marquette. Has published nine books and fifty articles on theology and religious education, as well as audio and television tapes for NCR and Argus; at present working on a book, *The Fundamentals of Religious Education*.

1. Paul Tillich, "The Protestant Principle and the Proletarian Situation," in *The Protestant Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 163. This collection of essays will be referred to as *PE*.

2. *Ibid.*, Cf. George Tavard, "The Protestant Principle and the Theological System of Paul Tillich," in Thomas O'Meara (ed.), *Paul Tillich in Catholic Thought* (Dubuque: The Priory Press, 1964), pp. 85 - 97.

for confronting the abuses of pure autonomy and heteronomy, and for sustaining theonomy. While it protects man's genuine autonomy and rejects the absolute exercise of authority, it insists that the source of authority and law in culture is God.

B. Basic Tenets

1. *Justification through Faith*

In Tillich's early considerations of the Protestant principle, he was very much influenced by his mentor, Martin Kaehler. In his lectures, Kaehler was preoccupied with the question of justification through faith. He approached this question from a classical, humanistic perspective. This approach, of course, appealed to Tillich's own background and mentality, for it enabled him to use his philosophical background and approach the problem through reason. From this viewpoint, salvation pertained not only to the moral life, but to the intellectual life as well. Therefore, "not only he who is in sin but also he who is in doubt is justified through faith."⁽³⁾ From that point on, Tillich would discuss justification and its fulfillment in theonomy in terms of the structures of the mind and cultural creativity, as well as in terms of morality. This search for God could now be carried out amidst the rational struggle with doubt.

The situation of doubt, even of doubt about God, need not separate us from God. There is faith in every serious doubt, namely the faith in the truth as such, even if the only truth we can express is our lack of truth. But if this is experienced in its depth and as an ultimate concern, the divine is present; and he who doubts in such an attitude is 'justified' in his thinking. So the paradox got hold of me that he who seriously denies God affirms him. Without it I could not have remained a theologian.⁽⁴⁾

This insight gave Tillich the courage to risk facing reality in all its dimensions, open all questions, and confront his culture without fear of losing justification. His faith was a rational commitment, consistent with the structures of the mind. Since it was his conviction that rational structures were in fact rooted in the divine, and that all reality was grounded in God, there was now no room for "something beside the divine." There was no room for a genuine atheism or a wall between the religious and the non-religious, between the sacred and the secular. To be truly religious was

3. Paul Tillich, "Author's Introduction," *PE*, p. x. Cf. Arne Unhjem, *Dynamics of Doubt: A Preface to Tillich* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 13ff; and Theodore Siegfried, "The Significance of Paul Tillich's Theology for the German Situation," in Charles Kegley and Robert Bretall (eds.), *The Theology of Paul Tillich* (New York: MacMillan, 1964), pp. 80ff.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. x-xi.

to be ultimately concerned, and this concern could be expressed in all forms. Yet, Tillich was conscious that man's estrangement forces him to carry on his search in doubt and often despair. Justification occurs in the experience of the presence and the absence of the divine.

This unconditional seriousness is the expression of the presence of the divine in the experience of utter separation from it. It is this radical and universal interpretation of the doctrine of justification through faith which made me a conscious Protestant.⁽⁵⁾

Tillich dealt with pure autonomy and heteronomy in this context of justification. To say that faith is a rational commitment is not to say that man is justified through right thinking. The rationality of faith is not mere speculation; it is reason grasped by revelation, reason acting out of its depth and in relation to the ultimate. Pure autonomy, then, is a distortion of reason, as well as of faith. It must be returned to the ultimate, and this can be done in terms of the very emptiness and meaningless experienced when it is exercised. Therefore, justification can indeed be brought out of the secularity and the meaningless that often is experienced in the modern technological and capitalistic culture. By the same token, justification can come in the midst of the tyranny of either ecclesiastical or political authority. This is not achieved, of course, through blind submission to these authorities, but through a persistent search for the authority of God. Justification, then, is achieved through faith in self and reality, both of which are grounded in the ultimate. In this, is realized theonomy.

2. *Refusal to Leave the Boundary*

One of the most vehement protests in the Protestant principle is against any attempt to draw man away from his "boundary situation." It is from the boundary between finite and the infinite, between faith and reason, between the human and the divine, between pure autonomy and heteronomy that man must search for the theonomous synthesis. This is not to say that man searches in a world of dichotomies. Rather he searches in a world of estranged reality, and reaches out for unity and meaning. Despite the anguish, man can never leave this boundary and solve his dilemma by jumping to either side. Neither complete independence of the divine, nor acceptance of absolute law masquerading as the divine is safe ground for man. Therefore, the Protestant principle objects to any conditioned form, theory, structure, authority or person that claims unconditionality and denies man's boundary situation.

The boundary situation is a recognition of the limits of human existence, the limits which threaten this existence. Each person faces these limits in death, the ultimate threat to bodily existence. Everyone faces these limits in freedom of choice, whereby vital existence can be destroyed.

5. *Ibid.*, p. x.

To be a man involves this transcending of vital existence, the freedom from himself, the freedom to say 'Yes' or 'No' to his vital existence. This freedom, which is an essential part of him and from which he cannot escape, carries with it the fact that he is radically threatened. Man is in a genuine sense the threatened creature because he is not bound to his vital existence, because he can say 'Yes' or 'No' to it. This is manifest in the fact that man can raise the question of the true and that he can demand the fulfillment of the good.⁽⁶⁾

Humans, then, raise the question about true reality from a posture of being in some sense separated from this reality. We make demands on a reality, which is not fully at hand. Yet, we must raise the questions and make the demands, even though this results in a tension, a deep restlessness, and a threat to existence. When we experience this situation in its ultimate character, we are experiencing the boundary situation. "The point at which not-being in the ultimate sense threatens us is the boundary line of all human possibility, the human border situation."⁽⁷⁾

The original Protestant insight refused to evade this ultimate threat by turning to either the autonomy of secularity or the heteronomy of ecclesiastical authority. The "solutions" were viewed as being finite, with no guarantee in themselves, and so they were rejected with the same independence with which one rejects any finite solution. Yet, Tillich argues, this rejection was not done in a spirit of arrogance, as Catholics so often think. Nor was this an assertion that the individual is the ultimate arbiter of religion. It was a matter of proceeding as one who finds himself in a situation in which he shares the lot of everything human to be subject to the ultimate threat of not-being. True, a great deal of religious substance was lost in the process, but not in a spirit of pure autonomy.

Perhaps Catholicism is right in thinking that the religious substance is better preserved in the authoritarian community. But certainly Catholicism is wrong in thinking that Protestantism is to be explained as an attempt of the individual to become the bearer of the religious substance.⁽⁸⁾

The Protestant, then, is willing to sacrifice religious substance, with its richness, depth and tradition, rather than accept a false security against the unconditional threat that exists in the boundary situation. Thus this principle resists sacraments, which attempts to "magically" circumvent the ultimate threat; it avoids mysticism, which offers immediate unity with the Unconditioned. It rejects a priesthood, which offers false spiritual security.

6. Paul Tillich, "The Protestant Message of the Man of Today," *PE*, p. 195. Cf. Unhjem, *op. cit.*, p. 53; and John P. Newport, *Paul Tillich* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1984), p. 140.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 198.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 199. Cf. Guy Hammond, "Tillich and the Frankfurt Debate about Patriarchy and the Family," in John J. Carey (ed.), *Theonomy and Autonomy* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), pp. 109ff.

It ignores ecclesiastical authority that claims to have the absolute truth. Tillich is well aware of the risk here, for rejection of these can mean anguish and loss of substantial meaning. Nevertheless, Tillich maintains that this position has its own strength, the strength of the cross, the cross that is carried in the boundary situation. "In this power, indeed, in this impotence and poverty, the Protestant church will stand so long as it is aware of the meaning of its own existence."⁹

There seems to be a bit of rigidity in this position. Are we to assume that at the time of the Reformation all ecclesiastical forms had become idols and thus had to be dispensed with? If this is so, then how are we to explain Tillich's observation that in eliminating them true religious substance was lost? Merely following Tillich's own line of reasoning, it would seem that forms which are still able to point beyond themselves are theonomous. Considering the premium which Tillich puts on substantial meaning, one wonders how he can endorse the elimination of forms without more careful discernment as to the depth of their meaning.

With this reservation, we do agree that simplistic or superstitious answers to the mystery of human life are unsuitable. Humanity's independence and authority are existentially always inadequate in answering the questions of human existence. The boundary situation is essential to human existence. Nevertheless, this does not rule out the possibility of legitimate forms bearing substantial meaning for humanity.

There is a paradox involved in living in the boundary situation. Tillich insists that we must retain the radical experience of threat and thus refuse to accept traditions or utopias which attempt to assuage this experience. At the same time, the Protestant principle asserts that we discover the meaning of life in the midst of our boundary experience. Therefore, Protestantism, if it is to be genuine, must

pronounce the 'Yes' that comes to man in the boundary—situation when he takes it upon himself in its ultimate seriousness. Protestantism must proclaim the judgement that brings assurance by depriving it of all security; the judgement that declares us whole in the disintegration and cleavage of soul and community; the judgement that affirms our having truth in the very absence of truth (even of religious truth); the judgement that reveals the meaning of our life in the situation in which all the meaning of life has disappeared. This is the pith and essence of the Protestant message.¹⁰

Apparently, this "meaning of life" is discovered through man's affirmation of the New Being, as manifest in Jesus as the Christ. Protestantism lives in the power of his New Being, and through its persistent exercise

9. *Ibid.*, p. 200. Cf. James Luther Adams, *Paul Tillich's Philosophy of Culture, Science and Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 17ff.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 204. Cf. Daniel O'Hanlon, S.J., "The Influence of Schelling on the Thought of Paul Tillich" (excerpts from a dissertation, Rome: Gregorianum University, 1958), pp. 41ff.

of its principle, it is able to come to substantial meaning. Jesus was the example "par excellence" of one who never allowed anything finite, including himself, to assume the role of the ultimate. Through his power, Protestantism is able to transcend the finite and discover the holy within and beyond cultural forms.

Culture is not subjected to religion, nor is religion dissolved in culture. Protestantism neither devaluates nor idealizes culture. It tries to understand its religious substance, and spiritual foundation, its 'theonomous' nature. And Protestantism neither idealizes nor devaluates religion. It tries to interpret religion as the direct, intentional expression of the spiritual substance which in the cultural forms is presented indirectly and unintentionally. In this way the Protestant principle denies to the Church the holy sphere as its separate possession, and it denies to culture a secular sphere that can escape the judgement of the boundary situation.⁽¹¹⁾

Thus the Protestant principle is expressed both inside and outside the Church. It is expressed wherever the boundary situation is preached, and this may be done by movements which are not ecclesiastical. It may even be expressed by individuals or groups which do not use Christian symbols, for this principle manifests the universal human situation, wherein people reach for the beyond within a limited situation.

3. *Dogma to be Resisted*

The Protestant principle rejects the absolute definition of dogmas and the enforcement of these dogmas on the faithful. Tillich submits that this is particularly protested in the modern era of doubt. He maintains that the major doctrines of the Christian faith, i.e., the doctrines concerning God, Christ, the Church and revelation are so seriously questioned by the modern world that they can no longer be presented in their traditional forms. Therefore, the Protestant principle, as operative in the modern world, protests the direct proclamation of the religious truth of the Bible and tradition.

It cannot be required of the man of today that he first accept theological truths, even though they should be God and Christ. Wherever the Church in its message makes this primary demand, it does not take seriously the situation of the man of today and has no effective defense against the challenge of many thoughtful men of our day who reject the message of the Church as of no concern for them. . . . The profoundest aspect of justification, in our situation and for the man of today, is that we can discern God at the very moment when all known assertions about 'God' have lost their power.⁽¹²⁾

11. *Ibid.*, p. 205.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 202 – 203. Ronald Modras, *Paul Tillich's Theology of Church* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1976), pp. 224ff.

When reading this last quotation, we must remember that Tillich was writing during the dismal years between the wars. Even then one wonders if he is not overstating the case when he says that "all known assertions about God have lost their power." Nevertheless, it is true that the modern period has experienced a breakdown in "God language," and that there is a decided need to re-formulate doctrines in terms that can be understood and believed by modern people. One wonders, however, if this rules out the proclamation of religious truth of the Bible and tradition in new forms. Furthermore, is the rejection of doctrine by modern people an adequate criterion for the invalidity of these doctrines? In Tillich's own terms, is it not possible that they could be acting out of pure autonomy, or even intent on enforcing their own views with a new kind of heteronomy?

4. *Support for Theological Development*

Tillich places the Protestant principle at the very heart of theological development, in order to prevent either extreme liberalism or orthodoxy, the theological expressions of pure autonomy and heteronomy. At the same time, this principle guides these movements in theology. It has moved liberal theology, for instance, to break through the limits of literalism and approach the Bible with critical methods and scientific honesty. In other words, this principle gave biblical studies a new freedom from the restraining dogmatism of the church. It brought liberal theology to the realization that it could not be cut off from the cultural development of humanity. It stressed that theology must be involved in the changing structure of human life, and thus brought theology to a new relevance.⁽¹³⁾ At the same time, it brought liberal theology into confrontation with the supranaturalism of the Roman Catholic system of theology, with its dualism between nature and grace, its metaphysical devaluation of the natural, and its heteronomous authority.⁽¹⁴⁾

The Protestant principle also served to lead orthodox theologians to view scripture "as the original document of the event which is called 'Jesus the Christ' and which is the criterion of all Scripture and the manifestation of the Protestant principle."⁽¹⁵⁾ By bringing orthodoxy back to the gospel, it was able to challenge orthodoxy's rigid doctrinaire identification of scripture and dogma. It reminded orthodoxy of the many demonic distortions which have occurred in the history of religions. It emphasized the infinite distance between God and man, and brought the judgement of the Cross to all human possibilities. Thus it confronted the assured smugness of orthodoxy, by proclaiming that nothing can overcome the estrangement

13. Paul Tillich, "Author's Introduction," *PE*, p. xxiii.

14. *Ibid.*, Cf. Gustave Weigel, S.J., "Contemporaneous Protestantism and Paul Tillich," *Theological Studies* II (1950), pp. 187ff.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. xxiii-xxiv. Cf. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), III, p. 177.

between man and God except "the paradoxical and reconciling act of divine-giving."¹⁶

Tillich successfully uses this principle to prevent either rationalism or dogmatism in theological development. It is his conviction that both attempt to eliminate the paradox, the mystery of life, while they establish a false security. He refused to settle for a conditioned solution to man's threatened condition. By limiting the solution to an act of divine self-giving, it may appear that Tillich, however, is moving into the very supernaturalism which he is trying to avoid. However, his attitude toward Barth clarifies how he avoids such a move. First, he grants that Barth saved contemporary Protestantism from sectarian seclusion and secularism through his radical protest in the name of the unconditional character of the divine. Yet, Tillich objects that Barth overstressed the "No" of the Protestant *Gestalt* and neglected the "Yes." Barth made revelation a one-way process, from the divine to the human, and Tillich objects that this is, in fact, a new kind of orthodoxy, a new form of heteronomy.¹⁷ Therefore, in reaction, Tillich insisted on the "Yes" regarding our ability to receive the Unconditioned in the very structures of reason and reality. This point is central in the theonomous synthesis of Tillich.

5. *Grace as the Source of Authority*

Since heteronomous authority is rejected by this principle, the key question is: "By what authority *does* Protestantism raise its protest against every sacred and secular reality that lays claim to unconditionality?" First of all, this protest cannot come from a human authority because of the obvious finite limitations. If Protestantism is going to protect the majesty of the Unconditioned against all attempts of idolatry, then somehow Protestantism must participate in the Unconditioned. This participation in the unconditional, trans-human authority involves a living in the reality of grace, or the sacred structure of reality. "No Protestant protest is possible unless it is rooted in a *Gestalt* in which grace is embodied."¹⁸ Yet, Tillich realized that to speak of "grace embodied" or the "reality of grace" or the "*Gestalt* of grace" would be considered dangerous by many Protestants. For them, grace must be something intangible, while a *Gestalt* would seem to indicate something that can be grasped or touched. An embodied grace could well sound too much like Catholic sacramentalism and a return to the Roman system of legalized grace, the papacy and hierarchical authority, all

16. *Ibid.*, p. xxiv. Cf. Newport, *op. cit.*, pp. 117ff.

17. Paul Tillich, "The Formative Power of Protestantism," *PE*, p. 206. Newport, *op. cit.*, p. 176. Cf. also Theodore Runyon, "Tillich's Understanding of Revolution," John J. Carey (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 268; and O.C. Thomas, "Barth and Tillich: A Conversation on Contemporary Theology," *Religion and Life*, XXXIII (Autumn, 1963), pp. 508 - 520.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 209. Cf. Thomas G. Bandy, "Tillich's Limited Understanding of the Thought of Henri Bergson as 'Life Philosophy'," in John Carey (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 14.

the things which deprived the church of its spiritual, invisible character. Could this not be a regression to the conditioned structures that attempted to eliminate the boundary situation? Tillich is well aware of this danger, but does not think that the *Gestalt* of grace is such a regression. This proposal is neither a return to Romanism, nor is it a re-assertion of unstructured (Gestalt-less) Protestantism. This is a new direction that moves beyond the former life and death struggle with Rome, and even beyond the classical Reformation position, both of which must now be subject to the criticism of the Protestant principle. This is not a solution that takes either side in a now dated controversy, but the new application of the Protestant principle in the contemporary situation. Thus Tillich moves beyond what he considered the idolatry of past Catholicism and the formlessness of contemporary Protestantism to the center of the Protestant doctrine, to the "divine structure of reality," as appropriated by faith.

The divine judgement, in spite of its transcendence and independence, has meaning and power only if it is appropriated by faith, in the church and in the Christian. Faith is the faith of man. It does not come *from* man, but is effective *in* man. And in so far as faith is in a community or personality, they are embodiments of grace. Faith is created by the hearing of the 'Word.' The Word is said from beyond us, to us. But if it is received, it is no longer only transcendent. It is also immanent, creating a divine structure of reality. Thus it creates faith as the formative power of a personal life and of a community. The Word is said from beyond man, but it is said through men. Men must be able to say it, they must be grasped and transformed by it, and this must have happened ever since the Word became manifest in history. Structures of grace must be permanently actual *in* history — if in *any* moment of history the Word is to be pronounced.⁽¹⁹⁾

Substantial meaning, then, is transcendent, and yet it becomes embodied in man and in history. It would seem that these structures of grace, which grasp the personal life of the individual carries with it its own authority. This, of course, is the authority of the divine itself, immanently expressed in man and in history. Exactly how this authority is to be exercised and implemented is really not sufficiently treated by Tillich. He does successfully challenge any authority that is cut off from the divine, i.e., heteronomous authority, but he deems it difficult to propose a concrete authority that can recognize the validity of what appears to be the divine structure of reality. Does faith become its own authority, and if so, how does one arrive at a consensus of the truth as it appears in history?

The main contribution of this theology of grace is that it does avoid viewing grace as a tangible, objectified reality. Grace remains as a divine gift, but it appears through a living *Gestalt*. Meanwhile, both grace and the

19. *Ibid.*, p. 210.

forms through which grace is conveyed remain unconditioned and conditioned in their own right.

The divine appears *through* the humanity of Christ, through the historical weakness of the church, through the finite material of the sacrament. The divine appears through the finite realities as their transcendent meaning. Forms of grace are finite forms, so to speak selected by grace, that it may appear through them; but they are not forms that are transmuted by grace so that they may become identical with it. . . . Such identification is, according to the Protestant principle, demonic *hybris*.⁽²⁰⁾

As a consequence, finite forms are able to maintain their own autonomy. They are not identified with the divine, yet they are able to point beyond themselves to the ultimate. The theonomous culture, therefore, is one in which the forms offer this directional dimension; forms that do not become idols in themselves.

Even though the *Gestalt* of grace is not something tangible, it is able to be perceived through a certain "imaginative intuition." There is a certain transparency in this *Gestalt*, which allows the ultimate to shine through and be perceived by grace.

A *Gestalt* of grace is a 'transparent' *Gestalt*. Something shines through it which is more than it. The church is church because it is transparent as the *Gestalt* of grace. The saint is saint, not because he is 'good', but because he is transparent for something that is more than he himself is. Faith alone can perceive the grace in a *Gestalt* of grace: for faith means being transformed by grace.⁽²¹⁾

If the Protestant church lays claim to be such a *Gestalt* of grace, the question arises as to how this church can protest against itself. In other words, once the Protestant principle has become embodied within a church, what is to prevent this church from identifying itself with grace, rather than being a bearer of grace? Tillich attempts to answer this by submitting that Protestantism must associate itself with secularism, which consistently resists the sacred sphere and ecclesiastical authority. In this way a so-called "Protestant secularism" evolves, which is critical of anything that is falsely sacred, and which, at the same time, can locate the holy on all levels of reality.

In so far as secularism is an offspring of Protestantism and is related to it in cooperation or enmity, we may call it 'Protestant secularism.' According to the Protestant principle, it is possible that within the secular world grace is operating not in a tangible but in a transparent

20. *Ibid.*, p. 212. Cf. W.L. Rowe, *Religious Symbols and God: A Philosophical Study of Tillich's Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

21. *Ibid.*, Cf. Modras, *op. cit.*, pp. 115 – 116.

form. This possibility implies that grace is not bound to any finite form, not even to a religious form. It is sovereign even with respect to forms that by their very nature are supposed to be bearers of grace, such as the churches.⁽²²⁾

Tillich, of course, realizes that the relationship between Protestantism and secularity is a precarious one. If Protestantism surrenders to secularism, it ceases to be a *Gestalt* of grace. On the other hand, once Protestantism retires from the critical position of secularity, it loses its powers of protest. We might add, in light of our earlier treatment of secularity, that in this relationship Protestantism runs the risk of becoming completely autonomous, and thus losing contact with its proper depth of meaning. Tillich is aware of this danger and thus he establishes four principles that must be followed in Protestant form creation, to make these forms effective in pointing to the ultimate:

- 1) In every Protestant form the religious element must be related to, and questioned by, a secular element. The secular element expresses the finite structure of reality and indirectly shows the relations of the finite to the infinite. The secular element also serves as a corrective against Protestantism identifying itself with the unconditioned. In addition, secular forms are not rigid, and are always open to transformation by autonomous creativity.
- 2) In every Protestant form the eternal element must be expressed in relation to the "present situation". This does not mean bondage to the moment or abandonment of form to total relativity. It does mean contact with the depth of the present, the dynamic structure of the present historical situation. This allows for a change in forms and for a constant transcending of past forms to the reality that is expressed in these forms.
- 3) The given reality of grace in every Protestant form must be expressed with daring and risk. This does not mean arbitrariness, but venturing forth with the willingness to discover.

The 'really real' cannot be reached under logical or methodological guarantees. A daring act is demanded, an act that penetrates to the deepest level of reality, to its transcendent ground. Such an act is what in the religious tradition is called 'faith' and what we have called a 'belief-ful' or 'self-transcending realism.'⁽²³⁾

22. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 215. Cf. Paul Tillich, "Realism and Faith," *PE*, p. 68; Guyton Hammond, *The Power of Self-Transcendence* (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1966), p. 37; Melvin Watson, "The Social Thought of Paul Tillich," *Journal of Religious Thought*, X, No. 1 (1952-53), pp. 6ff.; Raymond F. Bulman, *A Blueprint for Humanity: Paul Tillich's Theology of Culture* (East Brunswick, N.J.: Assoc. University Presses, 1981); Ronald H. Stone, *Paul Tillich's Radical Social Thought* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980).

- 4) This attitude of belief-ful realism must be expressed in every Protestant form. Protestant formative power must not build on a place that is either before or beyond the really real. It must grasp reality in its unconditional and irresistible seriousness.

In this perspective, the secular forms approach religious forms, without becoming religious themselves. The secular and the *Gestalt* of grace become related in such a way that true theonomy is achieved, while both secular autonomy and heteronomy are rejected.

Under this 'silent' influence of Protestantism on the culture to which it belongs, secular thinking is driven to the question of its own foundation and meaning, i.e., to the question of religious knowledge; and secular action is driven to the question of ultimate purpose and fulfillment, i.e., to the question of religious action, individual and social. For this 'dialectical' relation between the secular world and the *Gestalt* of grace I like to use the word 'theonomy' which indicates that neither ecclesiastical heteronomy nor secular autonomy can have the last word is human culture.⁽²⁴⁾

C. The End of the Protestant Era?

In 1937 Tillich asked Protestantism a rather alarming question: "Is the Protestant era coming to an end?"⁽²⁵⁾ In his discussion of the question, he pointed out that the traditional forms of Protestantism would probably not outlast the current period of mass disintegration. In this sense, the Protestant era could well be coming to an end. In addition, the very Protestant principle itself was being contradicted by the emerging social principles and organizations. The meaninglessness of life that was largely brought about by the autonomy of capitalism had caused an emptiness and sense of drift among the masses. They were in turn moving toward heteronomous state structure in order to gain security.

They are longing for a leader, for symbols, for ideas which would be beyond criticism. They are longing for the possibility of enthusiasm, sacrifice, and self-subjection to collective ideas and activities.⁽²⁶⁾

Such a movement, of course, would be completely against the Protestant principle, which maintains that "no individual and no human group can claim a divine dignity for its moral achievements, for its sacramental power, for its sanctity, or for its doctrine."⁽²⁷⁾ According to this principle, as we

24. *Ibid.*, p. 220.

25. Paul Tillich, "The End of the Protestant Era?" *PE*, pp. 222 - 233.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 225.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 226. Tillich notes that in fact Protestantism is participating in the disintegration by establishing its own absolutes. The "protest" of Barth is too negative and has not been able to capture the middle class or young. The leadership in the Protestant churches is in the same process of disintegration as society because it was too dependent on the state and other social groups.

have seen, there can be no sacred system or authority, whether ecclesiastical or political.

Tillich at that time outlined the task that faced Protestantism, if it was to survive, at least in its basic principle. First, Protestantism would have to reformulate its message and its symbols in such a way that it would be received by a world that was disintegrating. Secondly, it would have to take more advantage of its special ability for dealing with the secular world. It would have to tear down the wall between the sacred and the secular and bring secular culture to its proper depth of meaning.⁽²⁸⁾ Finally, Protestantism would have to continue to protect itself against every power, church, state, party, or leader that claimed divine character for itself. Only then would Protestantism be able to save modern culture from the disintegration that results from subjection to such absolutism. Should Protestantism give up its mission to protest to such heteronomy, the Protestant era and indeed the Protestant principle would have come to an end.⁽²⁹⁾

Despite the limitations which we have noted during our discussion of the Protestant principle, it is a valuable effort to return to the initial insights of Protestantism. It is very much in line with the ecumenical currents in contemporary theology. Its tenets are basically sound, and its application, with perhaps more openness to the possibility of valid ecclesiastical forms, would move culture toward the theonomy that Tillich envisioned.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 229 – 230. Cf. Raymond F. Bulman, "Theonomy and Technology: A Study in Tillich's Theology of Culture," in John J. Carey (ed.), *Kairos and Logos* (Cambridge: North American Tillich Society, 1978).

29. *Ibid.*, p. 232. Tillich notes that for Protestantism to survive, it may have to work through orthodoxy, Catholicism, Fascism or Communism. In all these movements it will take the form of resistance against the distortion of humanity and divinity which necessarily is connected with the rise of the new systems of authority.