Christianity and World Religions: The Contributions of Barth and Tillich

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For centuries Christianity proclaimed itself as the sole path to salvation (extra ecclesiam nulla salus). *Recent advocates of pluralism have radically challenged exclusivism as arrogant and bigoted, and so unchristian. Is there a way to strengthen the gracious insights of pluralism while simultaneously maintaining the integrity of Christianity? Karl Barth and Paul Tillich provide insights and analyses that enable Christians to regard major religions as genuine expressions of divine–human encounter and legitimate paths to salvation, and to understand Christianity itself as the decisive witness to this truth. Because Barth is typically, but inaccurately, regarded as an exclusivist, I have treated him first. But both theologians, in different ways, argue that God is the Redeemer; all human beings are redeemed; and Jesus as the Christ is the decisive light in which this truth is seen and the standard for making known universal divine redemption. Further, Barth and Tillich agree that it is the task of Christians both to proclaim this redemption in Jesus and to recognize God's redemptive love in different contexts.*

One of the regularly recurring issues for Christian theology is to work out the self-understanding of Christianity vis-à-vis other major religious traditions, which involves coming to terms with the relation of any religion to the ultimate reality that is taken to be the ground and end of all existence.

When it has not simply ignored the other religious traditions Christianity has most typically either rejected them outright as wrong and without any possibility of salvation (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*), has attempted to convert them, or has regarded them patronizingly

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as somehow pre-Christian, but not fully revelational. Increasingly in the last few centuries, however, contact with different cultures and religions has brought with it the demand to take the major religions seriously as genuine expressions of divine–human encounter and as paths to salvation. Ironically, it has often been as a result of vigorous missionary activity that enlightened and sensitive Christians have been put in touch with lives that, by any relevant criteria, would be regarded as redeemed, so that it becomes apparent that the religious outlook that sustains them is the expression of a power whose source lies far beyond the historical accidents of their particular culture. Thus it has occurred to many observers that, although the religious traditions are irreducibly many and different, they all in various ways point beyond themselves to a transcendent reality that may be said to be "the true light, which enlightens everyone" (John 1:9).

With increasing force, therefore, the point of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's fable of the three rings—namely, that "the father wished to tolerate no longer in his house the tyranny of just one ring"[1]—is being driven home. That is to say, the assumption voiced by Saladin in *Nathan the Wise,* that of the three religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—"only one can be the true one,"[2] is regarded as both false and pernicious. Two centuries later this insight is understood to apply, not only to the three major theistic religions, but to the major nontheistic religions as well. Jewish, Christian, and Muslim fundamentalists to the contrary notwithstanding, any religious claim to be the *one true* religion to the exclusion of all others, or even the true revelation in the light of which all others must be judged inadequate, risks the charge of bigotry or even idolatry. Indeed the major consequence of such claims seems to be to mobilize weak and mindless individuals into a powerful political and military force bent upon bringing down civilization. Although the claim increasingly is found to have little intellectual credibility, it remains a potent psychological and political weapon, and as such demands a careful response. This is all the more so because for most of its history the Christian conviction has been that Christianity itself was called into being by the claim to uniqueness and supremacy that is thought to have been expressed in John

[1] Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Nathan the Wise: A Dramatic Poem in Five Acts*, trans. Bayard Quincy Morgan (New York: Continuum, 1983), 79.

[2] Lessing, *Nathan the Wise*, 73.

14:6: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

The question is: Is there a way beyond such an apparently arrogant exclusivism that does not fall prey to the all-leveling relativism that itself seems incapable of making critical evaluations of itself and of others?

I believe there is, and I believe that elements in the theologies of two giants of a previous generation, namely, Karl Barth and Paul Tillich, can be focused to shed considerable light on this issue. Having made this claim I am fully aware of the common charge that Barth, at least, is no more a friend of religions other than Christianity than he is of philosophy or secular humanism. His Christomonism is seemingly so radical as to demand that everything be sacrificed to the Word of God revealed in Christ. In fact, Barth is the one theologian cited by John Hick as representing the view that Christianity has "a uniqueness and finality which makes it superior to all others." Hick quotes Barth as writing of "the pre-eminence of Christianity which alone has the commission and the authority to be a missionary religion, i.e., to confront the world of religions as the one true religion, with absolute self-confidence to invite and challenge it to abandon its way and to start on the Christian way."[3]

Taken at face value, this statement seems to confirm the worst fears about Barth's exclusivism. In terms of the metaphor that Hick puts forward—that our theology of religions requires a "Copernican revolution" or a "paradigm shift from a Christianity-centered or Jesus-centered model to a God-centered model of the universe of faiths"[4]—Barth seems to be a throwback to an unmodified "Ptolemaic theology" that appears to be Christianity-centered or Jesus-centered in a way that makes no attempt to moderate this aggressively absolutist stand in the direction of a more generous approach to the worth of religions other than Christianity. Even so, anyone who reads more than a few pages of Barth begins to realize that his thought is more nuanced than one passage taken out of context would suggest. Moreover, we find that Barth operates with a different set of assumptions, and so raises a different set of questions, than do Hick and many of the advocates of

[3] John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (Philadelphia, Pa.: The Westminster Press, 1982), 7–8. The passage from Barth is from *Church Dogmatics* I/2, 357.

[4] Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 18.

religious pluralism today. Therefore, we would do well to take a closer look at his considered thought about religion in general.

Barth

In making our way through Barth we should keep in mind that typically he contrasts *religion* with *revelation*. In Barth's theology "revelation" is the activity of the Word of God; it is God's grace that can only be received by faith which, itself, abjures reliance on any work of human piety. Revelation, the Word of God, divine grace *alone* can establish truth; it alone justifies. Barth is very Pauline in this. "Religion," on the other hand, is precisely the final human attempt to justify itself apart from God and it is an attempt, Barth believes, that is doomed to failure. As he had dramatically put it as early as 1916, "the righteousness of God" speaks to our conscience like an "alarm," but we "rush out sleepily before we have found out what is really the matter. . . . We stand here before the really tragic, the most fundamental, error of mankind. We long for the righteousness of God, and yet we do not let it enter our lives and our world. . . . We go off and build the pitiable tower at the Babel of our human righteousness, human consequence, human significance . . . *as if* our tower were important, as if something were happening, as if we were doing something in obedience to conscience."[5] All such activity, whether it be reason, morality, or religion, is *pride,* Barth holds; it is the Word of Man that obstructs the Word of God.

With this in mind we are prepared to reexamine the passage from Barth's *Church Dogmatics* that Hick brings forward as illustrative of a Christian exclusivism so in need of a "Copernican revolution." First, we can remind ourselves that when Barth contrasts "the Christian way" with the "world of religions" as "the one true religion" he always understands "religion" as the "Word of Man" in its most highly developed form and for that very reason most inclined to idolatry. He had made this point repeatedly in the section from which Hick extracted the apparently damaging passage. For instance, he says that religion is "unbelief" and is "the one great concern of godless man."[6] Moreover, throughout this section of the *Church Dogmatics* Barth reiterates the conviction that this judgment, made from the standpoint of

[5] Karl Barth, "The Righteousness of God," in *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1957), 14–15.

[6] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), 197, 300.

revelation, affects the *Christian* religion as well as any other religion: "It formulates the judgement of divine revelation upon all religions."[7] Thus, when he does turn to the discussion of "the true religion," Barth insists that "in our discussion of 'religion as unbelief' we did not consider the distinction between Christian and non-Christian religion. Our intention was that whatever was said about the other religions affected Christianity similarly."[8]

But this raises the question, why then speak of a "true religion" at all? Moreover, this brings us to a second point, namely, that although Barth does in fact speak of "true religion" when he says, "The Christian religion is true, because it has pleased God, who alone can be the judge in this matter, to affirm it to be the true religion,"[9] this claim is made in the context of having first affirmed that *no religion*, including Christianity, is true in and of itself. Therefore, to make claims to superiority or truth in terms of "the knowledge and worship of God and the reconciliation of man with God" is to invite condemnation: "We can speak of 'true religion,'" Barth says, "only in the sense in which we speak of a 'justified sinner.' . . . No religion is true. It can only become true . . . in the way in which man is justified, from without. . . . Like justified man, religion is a creature of grace. But grace is the revelation of God. No religion can stand before it as true religion."[10]

The "Christian way," therefore, is not the way of a superior religion which would be the way of the Word of Man writ large. It is, rather, the way of faith which itself is openness to the unmerited grace of God, accepting that grace and living confidently and freely in its power; it is reliance upon the Word of God and not on the human word of power. This alone is what has the commission and authority to confront the world of religions.

It is true that Barth asserts that we only know this grace, this truth, as it intersects human history in the name Jesus Christ, so that in virtue of Jesus Christ the Christian religion can be said to be justified. Yet, if Christianity forgets this great fact and proclaims itself rather than the God disclosed in Jesus Christ, it forfeits its justification. "It has its justification," Barth says, "either in the name of Jesus Christ, or not at all." And, he continues: "It is not that some men are

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7 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 300

8 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 300.

9 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 326.

10 Barth, *Church Dogmatics,* 350.

vindicated as opposed to others, or one part of humanity as opposed to other parts of the same humanity. It is that God himself is vindicated as opposed to and on behalf of all men and all humanity. That it can receive and accept this is the advantage and pre-eminence of Christianity, and the light and glory in which its religion stands. And as it does not have this light and glory of itself, no one can take it away from it."[11]

Now, calling to mind Hick's argument that a Copernican revolution in theology of religion will place *God* at the center of the universe of faiths and not Christianity or even Jesus, taken to be a literal and exclusive incarnation of deity, we may assert confidently that such was what Barth had been about all along. His Christocentrism is a theocentrism; his opposition to religion is opposition to the anthropocentrism that he believed most nineteenth-century liberal theology promoted. Barth insists that we know God is at the center by virtue of the grace freely given in Jesus Christ, but this does not deflect our vision away from God: "In the relationship between the name of Jesus Christ and the Christian religion, we have to do with an act of divine sanctification. We said that to find the basis of the assertion of the truth of Christianity we must first look away from it to the fact of God which is its basis, and that we have constantly to return to this 'first.' When we ask concerning this truth, we can never look even incidentally to anything but this fact of God."[12]

To be sure, Barth acknowledges that the Christian connection is with the name Jesus Christ, and that Christianity becomes the historical manifestation of that name and the means whereby that name can be proclaimed to the world of religions and the world at large. But what is the point of the name Jesus Christ? Once more, it is not to promote one historical religion at the expense of others, but rather to promote the fact of God—of God, not in itself, but of God-for-us. The name Jesus Christ declares God's righteousness, God's grace that overcomes and redeems human recalcitrance. It is, as Barth says, "that 'nevertheless' by which He associates us with Himself and declares Himself to be our God"[13] despite our attempts to elude God or to assert ourselves—in others words, to build our pitiable towers of Babel.

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[11] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 325–326.
[12] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 356–357.
[13] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 357–358.

This point, I think, is everywhere close to the surface in Barth's writings, but nowhere is it made more clearly and compellingly than in the section on Jesus in the commentary on Romans 3:21–26 in his seminal work, *The Epistle to the Romans*. Here Barth declares again and again God's *righteousness,* which is God's *Nevertheless* that contradicts human consequences and outweighs and forgives human sinfulness.[14] God's righteousness is God's great *Yes* to humanity that is often experienced as a *No*, but which penetrates and crosses out all our *no's* with a *Nevertheless* that redeems and brings us to freedom. Moreover, Barth declares that, although Christians know this God-for-us only through Jesus Christ, the *us* for whom God's redeeming love operates is *all* of humanity, not a particular segment of it. This point, and the heart of Barth's Christology, is brought home in the following lengthy but crucial passage:

> The righteousness of God is that upon which the whole existence and inevitability of the world is founded, and it is peculiarly visible when the world stands under the negation of judgement. It is the meaning of history, and especially of the complaint of history against its own inadequacy. It is the redemption of all creation, and most particularly when the creature knows itself to be no more than a creature, and so points beyond itself. Wherever there is an impress of revelation—and does anything whatsoever lack this mark?—there is a witness to the Unknown God, even if it be no more than an ignorant and superstitious worship of the most terrible kind (Acts xvii. 22, 23). Where have there not been *certain of your own poets who also* have said it (Acts xvii. 28)? Where there is experience, there is also the possibility of understanding. We proclaim no new thing; we proclaim the essential truth in everything that is old; we proclaim the incorruptible of which all corruption is a parable. . . .
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> The righteousness of God is manifested—*through his faithfulness in Jesus Christ*. The faithfulness of God is the divine patience according to which He provides, at sundry times and at divers points in human history, occasions and possibilities and witnesses of the knowledge of His righteousness. Jesus of Nazareth is the point at which it can be seen that all the other points form one line of supreme significance. He is the point at which is perceived the

[14] Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans,* trans. Edwyn C. Hoskins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 93.

> crimson thread which runs through all history. Christ—the righteousness of God Himself—is the theme of this perception. The faithfulness of God and Jesus the Christ confirm one another. . . .
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> Our discovery of the Christ in Jesus of Nazareth is authorized by the fact that every manifestation of the faithfulness of God points and bears witness to what we have actually encountered in Jesus. The hidden authority of the Law and the Prophets is the Christ who meets us in Jesus. Redemption and resurrection, the invisibility of God and a new order, constitute the meaning of every religion; and it is precisely this that compels us to stand still in the presence of Jesus. All human activity is a cry for forgiveness; and it is precisely this that is proclaimed by Jesus and that appears concretely in Him. The objection that this hidden power of forgiveness and, in fact, the whole subject-matter of religion, is found elsewhere, is wholly wide of the mark, since it is precisely we who have been enabled to make this claim. In Jesus we have discovered and recognized the truth that God is found everywhere and that, both before and after Jesus, men have been discovered by Him. In Him we have found the standard by which all discovery of God and all being discovered by Him is made known as such; in Him we recognize that this finding and being found is the truth of the order of eternity. Many live their lives in the light of redemption and forgiveness and resurrection; but that we have eyes to see their manner of life we owe to the One. In His light we see light. That it is the Christ whom we have encountered in Jesus is guaranteed by our finding in Him the sharply defined, final interpretation of the Word of faithfulness of God to which the Law and the Prophets bore witness.[15]

Reflection on this passage, coupled with the strong views Barth expressed in *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, leads me to reject as false and wholly wide of the mark the criticism of Hick and others. Far from making "exclusivist" claims for Christianity, Barth here gives powerful expression to a theology of the revelation of the righteousness of God that answers all our *no's* with a *Nevertheless: Yes*! As I indicated above, the "us" in whom and for whom God's redemptive activity operates is all humankind, not one particular religion. Barth says that "the righteousness of God is manifested *—through his faithfulness in Jesus Christ*"; he does not say that it is incarnated in, or alone

[15] Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 95–97.

resident in, Jesus Christ. He says that God "provides at sundry times and divers points in human history . . . witnesses of the knowledge of His righteousness. Jesus of Nazareth is the point at which it can be *seen* that all the other points form one line of supreme significance."[16] That it is given to us (Christians) to discern the "crimson thread which runs through all history" does not give us the special status of religious superiority. Rather, "the Christ whom we have encountered in Jesus" is "the standard by which all discovery of God and all being discovered by Him is made known as such."[17] The standard is that: a canon and criterion by which we can judge that "all human activity is a cry for forgiveness" *and* that this cry is answered everywhere by God's righteousness, God's faithful *Nevertheless,* God's redeeming love. Thus, it is given to us to see and to proclaim that "God is found everywhere and that, both before and after Jesus, men have been discovered by Him." The "Law and the Prophets" bear witness to this great fact, and it is wholly in keeping with the major point of this passage to assert that the varieties of Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Shinto, Taoism, Islam, and Judaism all have the capacity of bearing witness to the faithfulness of God.

That such redemptive love can be, and has been, uncovered and appropriated under historical forms that are radically different from those we have experienced should in no wise threaten us, but be the cause for rejoicing.

Tillich

Let us turn briefly to some aspects of Tillich's Christology for a view that corroborates, even if it does not take us farther, than Barth's point of view. To be sure, students of the two have come to expect a much more open attitude toward religions other than Christianity from Tillich than from Barth. Tillich's voice is never as strident as Barth's; throughout his career Tillich sought the religious dimension of all culture and entered into serious dialogue with both secular critics of religion and representatives of major religions. In the introduction to the third volume of his *Systematic Theology,* Tillich admits that "a Christian theology which is not able to enter into a creative

[16] Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 96, italics added.
[17] Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans,* 97.

dialogue with the theological thought of other religions misses a world-historical occasion and remains provincial."[18]

Tillich's openness to other voices was given its final expression in the last public lecture that he gave, "The Significance of the History of Religions for the Systematic Theologian." In this lecture Tillich calls for the "interpenetration of systematic theological study and religious historical studies." He recognizes that the various religions are partial embodiments of the Ultimate or the Holy, but that no "actual religion, not even Christianity as a religion," can be identified as a final expression of the inner *telos* of all religions.[19] However, this final lecture taken by itself is sketchy and only suggestive for a Christian theology of religions. Can we find a basis in Tillich's systematic theology for going beyond the impasse of an arrogant exclusivism and an all-leveling relativism? I believe there are some aspects of his Christology that can help us out.

For Tillich the Christian assertion that Jesus is the Christ is the claim that in Christ the answer to the problem of existence is revealed and made salvific for humankind. As symbolized in the myth of the Fall, existence is estranged from the Ground of Being and is marked by negativities such as anxiety, guilt, pride, ambiguity, tragedy, and death. The reception of Jesus as the Christ is the appearance of the "New Being" under the conditions of existence. Jesus as the Christ is the revelation of the New Being and, at the same time, the bearer of salvation: "Where there is revelation there is salvation. Revelation is not information about divine things; it is the ecstatic manifestation of the Ground of Being in events, persons, and things. Such manifestations have shaking, transforming, and healing power. They are saving events in which the power of the New Being is present."[20]

It is the concept of Jesus as the bearer of New Being that is crucial for our purposes. "The term 'New Being,'" Tillich says, "is the restorative principle of the whole" of his theology. It is "essential being under the conditions of existence, conquering the gap between essence and existence."[21] That is, rather than restoring humanity to

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[18] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume III: Life and the Spirit, History and the Kingdom of God* (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), 6.

[19] Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions*, with a foreword by Krister Stendahl (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1994), 76, 72.

[20] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume II: Existence and the Christ* (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 166–167.

[21] Tillich, *Systematic Theology II*, 118–119.

a "pre-fall" state, which is not possible under the terms of concrete existence, the Christ brings about a new state of things that is neither essential being nor estranged existence, but is rather "healed" or "saved." Tillich derives his term New Being, from Paul's statement in Second Corinthians on the new creation: "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17–18).

Does Tillich's idea of Jesus as the manifestation and the bearer of New Being—that which brings salvation or healing to estranged existence—shed any light on the issue of salvation apart from Christ? In an uncanny parallel to Barth, Tillich speaks of a "history of concrete revelatory events with Christ at the center: "There is a history of revelation, the center of which is the event Jesus the Christ; but the center is not without a line which leads to it . . . and a line which leads from it." Thus we may speak properly of a "universal history of salvation" centered in Christ yet in which "it would be equally wrong to deny that revelatory events occur anywhere besides the appearance of Jesus as the Christ."[22]

Even so, Tillich avers, there is an "unbiblical but nevertheless ecclesiastical view of salvation" in which "salvation is either total or non-existent": "Salvation to eternal life is made dependent upon the encounter with Jesus as the Christ and the acceptance of his saving power," whereas all others are "condemned to exclusion from eternal life." Those who posit the issue and try to resolve it in this way are doomed either to absolutism or failure. "Only if salvation is understood as healing and saving power through the New Being *in all history* is the problem put on another level. In some degree all men participate in the healing power of the New Being. Otherwise, they would have no being."[23]

But is there any "special" salvation that accrues to those who have encountered the healing power as it appears in Jesus as the Christ? Tillich asserts that "the answer cannot be that there is no saving power apart from him but that he is the ultimate criterion of every healing and saving process."

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[22] Tillich, *Systematic Theology II*, 166–167.

[23] Tillich, *Systematic Theology II*, 167, italics added.

> We said before that even those who have encountered him are only fragmentarily healed. But now we must say that *in him* the healing quality is complete and unlimited. The *Christian remains in the state of relativity with respect to salvation*; the New Being in Christ transcends every relativity in its quality and power of healing. It is just this that makes him the Christ. Therefore, wherever there is saving power in mankind, it must be judged by the saving power in Jesus as the Christ.[24]

This, of course, is very like Barth in that the "ultimate criterion" equals the "standard" by which all human activity and all healing is judged.

In a remarkable sermon entitled "The New Being," written at the time he was working on volume II of his *Systematic Theology,* Tillich gave additional concrete expression to the meaning of New Being and extended it to embrace secular movements as well as religions other than Christianity. He takes as the text for his sermon a passage from Paul's letter to the Galatians: "For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation" (Gal. 6:15). "What is this New Being?" he asks. Evidently, it is to participate in the new state of things that is brought about by the appearance of the New Being in Jesus as the Christ. But this carries with it a clear negative implication, in which neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything. Tillich notes that for Paul and his readers this meant specifically "that neither to be a Jew nor to be a pagan is ultimately important; that only one thing counts, namely, the union with Him in whom the New Reality is present."[25] But the important question for us is not historical; rather, it is existential: what does this mean for us? In our present circumstances we can read Paul's declaration to mean: no religion matters finally, nor does any secular calling or movement. No religion, no secular effort can produce the new state of things: love, freedom, reconciliation with self, others, and the ground of all being, resurrection and life in the Spirit. Only the New Being as it is revealed in Jesus as the Christ can effect the new creation. Insofar as Christianity is a religion it, too, is unimportant, for "we all live in the old state of things, and the question asked of us by our text is whether we *also* participate in the new state of things."[26] All that Christians can legitimately do is to proclaim the message of the New Being which

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[24] Tillich, *Systematic Theology II*, 168, italics added.

[25] Paul Tillich, *The New Being* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 16.

[26] Tillich, *The New Being*, 15.

has encountered them and which is relevant to the entire world. To do otherwise would be to participate in the old state of things. How should Christianity respond when it encounters the other religions and secular movements of the world, Tillich asks.

> Shall Christianity tell them: Come to us, we are a better religion, our kind of circumcision or uncircumcision is higher than yours? Shall we praise Christianity, our way of life, the religious as well as the secular? Shall we make of the Christian message a success story, and tell them, like advertisers: try it with us, and you will see how important Christianity is for everybody? Some missionaries and some ministers and some Christian laymen use these methods. They show a total misunderstanding of Christianity. The apostle who was a missionary and a minister and a layman all at once says something different. He says: No particular religion matters, neither ours nor yours. But I want to tell you that something has happened that matters, something that judges you and me, your religion and my religion. A New Creation has occurred, a New Being has appeared; and we are all asked to participate in it. And so we should say to the pagans and Jews wherever we meet them: Don't compare your religion and our religion, your rites and our rites, your prophets and our prophets, your priests and our priests, the pious amongst you, and the pious amongst us. All this is of no avail! And above all don't think that we want to convert you to English or American Christianity, to the religion of the Western World. We do not want to convert you to us, not even to the best of us. This would be of no avail. We want only to show you something we have seen and to tell you something we have heard: That in the midst of the old creation there is a New Creation, and that this New Creation is manifest in Jesus who is called the Christ.[27]

If I may try to sum up Tillich's position, he sees that Jesus is the manifestation and the bearer of New Being that brings salvation or healing to estranged existence. But as *all existence* is estranged from the Ground of Being, so *all existence* is restored or healed by the appearance of the New Being in Jesus as the Christ. There is a "universal history of salvation" that is, nevertheless, centered in the event Jesus the Christ: Jesus as the Christ is the "ultimate criterion of every healing and saving process," but this is not an exclusive salvation

[27] Tillich, *The New Being*, 17–18.

belonging only to those who have followed Jesus or who have committed to him as Savior. In fact, "neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation." This means that neither my religion nor your religion matters ultimately, but a New Being has appeared and we are *all* asked to participate in it. So we cannot compare or judge religions; we can only show and tell what has been revealed to us: New Being available to all. To be a Christian is to know and proclaim that the God encountered and made known in Jesus Christ reconciles and redeems, restores and saves all creation irrespective of particular religious allegiances.

This, I believe, comports well with Barth's point of view, as we have seen: "The Christ whom we have encountered in Jesus" is "the standard by which all discovery of God and all being discovered by Him is made known as such," for "both before and after Jesus, men have been discovered by Him."[28] If the Law and the Prophets bear witness to this great fact, so do the varieties of all great religions.

Christians and World Religions

If participating in the New Being, or accepting in faith the righteousness of God, with redemption and resurrection for all, is close to the heart of the Christian gospel, and if one is to take the implications of this seriously, then Christians must train themselves to recognize God's redemptive activity, God's saving power, everywhere, but especially in other great religions, under other forms than those to which we have grown accustomed. Jesus said, "You will know the truth and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32). If, in fact, the truth of God in Christ genuinely sets us free, and if the life of faith is the resurrection life, then the life of freedom *from* the claims made by all that is not ultimate is the freedom *for* service to God and all of God's creation, allowing one to discern and promote the work of God in other great religions. "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10), Jesus proclaimed, so the Christian response should be to promote abundant life wherever and however it may manifest itself. And where this entails the promotion of other life-enhancing religions and/or humanisms, it is the Christian responsibility to do just that: not to dismantle them, nor to convert them, nor to triumph over them, but to enable them to respond adequately

[28] Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 97.

to the Word of God in their own tradition. Christians can confidently proclaim that "in the midst of the old creation there is a New Creation . . . manifest in Jesus who is called the Christ"[29] and simultaneously call on others to respond to the New Being in their own midst. Christians can confidently proclaim that in other religions we can see "the Christ whom we have encountered in Jesus," recognizing the "sharply defined, final interpretation of the Word of faithfulness of God to which the Law and the Prophets bore witness" and asserting that "in Jesus we have discovered and recognized the truth that God is found everywhere and that, both before and after Jesus, men have been discovered by Him."[30]

[29] Tillich, *The New Being*, 18.
[30] Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 97.