

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: PART I

Introduction

England was mistress of the seas. There was liberalism on the Continent, transcendentalism and revivalism in North America, and Roman Catholicism in Latin America. The British were, as always, eclectic. Although the average man in the western world did not know it, Marx had been right in saying that materialism and economics were more important than monarchs and politics. Humanism was becoming Christianity's most menacing rival. Individualism was beginning to fracture society. The whole world was quietly in ferment. At the very moment when provincials were content with the *status quo*, revolution, world war, re-evaluation and knowledge explosion were making up—like storm clouds on the horizon. Time was running out. In the twentieth century, as in no other recorded century in the history of the West (and maybe of the world), there have been radical change and progress on every front.

Philosophy began the century under the banner of Idealism.

Two forms of Realism were being developed—New Realism (Moore, Montague, Perry, et al.) in the realm of epistemology; and critical Realism (Santayana and Lovejoy).

The mathematical formulations of logic (Russell, Wittgenstein, Ramsay, Carnap, et al.) have led to great struggle in the area of language (such as Logical Positivism).

Social philosophy was united often with outright politics and treated along with psychology (Levin, Weber, Levy-Bruhl). Behaviourism by Watson, Gestalt by Wertheimer and psychoanalysis by Freud, Adler, Jung and Jaspers are all twentieth-century schools of thought. Instrumentalism with a scientific basis (Poincaré, Dewey and phenomenology (Husserl, Scheler, Heidegger) have a social appeal as well.

Religious experience has been emphasized (Höfding, Berdyaev, Barth) while Scholasticism or Neo-Thomism were also projected (Geyser, Maritain). A sort of Neo-Kantian thought has arisen (Cassirer, Ortega and Gassett) while the philosophy of physical science has been the natural product of the "atomic age" (Planck and Frank).

It is clearly evident that a serious treatment of the twentieth-century thought revolution cannot be presented in this brief work on philosophy and religion. Thoughts on the twentieth century's philosophical influence on religion must be confined to what appears to be the most important aspects of it. Of course, the choice of material will have to reflect the author's preferences.

Outline briefly the conditions existing as the twentieth century dawned.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

The Irrational Departure

The world-changing act of Martin Luther's nailing of his ninety-five theses on the door of the Wittenberg Church has never been really duplicated, but Karl Barth's *Römerbrief* written at the obscure village of Safenwil, Switzerland, rocked the theological world of 1918-1919.

Karl Barth (1886-1968)

Karl Barth was born in Basel, Switzerland, to a family of many ministers. His "roots lie deeply imbedded in the Reformed or Calvinistic wing of the Swiss Reformation."¹ He studied in the University of Berlin with Adolph von Harnack, the great church historian. He concentrated his studies on The Acts of the Apostles and paid very little attention to the lectures of Hermann Gunkel, who also gave classes in Berlin at the time. In fact, he thought that Harnack's *The Essence of Christianity* was "a form of cultural Christianity."² He moved on to study with Wilhelm Hermann at Marburg in 1908 (Ritschlianism—against metaphysics for practical moral values). Barth was ordained at Bern in 1909. He was twenty-four years old.

Barth became pastor at Safenwil in 1911, where he served for the next ten years. While he was pastor there, Barth joined the Social-Democratic Party. He was appalled when ninety-three German intellectuals signed a manifesto supporting the Kaiser's war policies—among them were a number of liberal theologians.

Adolph Harnack affirmed in some correspondence with Barth that "the task of theology is one with the tasks of science in general." But Barth insisted that the task "is one with the task of preaching; it consists in taking up and passing on the word of Christ."³ "This word," according to Barth, "comes from God to man . . . the movement is in the reverse direction to all human science and research."⁴

As a young pastor at Safenwil, Barth discovered that he had nothing to preach when he stood before his people in the pulpit. In his perplexity, he turned to the *Epistle to the Romans*. He began to write a commentary to describe his new source of preaching materials. It became his celebrated *Römerbrief*, which he published in 1919.⁵

It appeared to the philosophers of that time that Barth had rejected philosophy when he insisted on the "wholly other" nature of God and denied the power of reason alone to encounter the Sovereign Creator of the universe. However, this was not true. Barth agreed with Anselm's *Fides Quaerens Intellectum* (faith seeking understanding). This, for Barth, opened the door to the use of reason based on revealed truth. This made a place for philosophy as a tool for biblical exegesis. But Barth strongly taught that philoso-

¹David L. Mueller, *Karl Barth* (Waco: Word Books, 1972), p. 14.

²Ibid., p. 16.

³John Macquarrie, *Twentieth-Century Religious Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1963), p. 321.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Daniel Jenkins, "Karl Barth," *A Handbook of Christian Theologians*, eds. Martin Marty and Dean G. Peerman (New York: Meridian Books, 1965), p. 397.

The theological world of 1918 was rocked by the publication of Karl Barth's _____.

(*Römerbrief*)

Outline briefly Karl Barth's life up to his ordination.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

He was pastor at _____.

(Safenwil)

According to Barth, the task of theology is one with _____.

(preaching)

In perplexity over his lack of preaching material, Barth began writing a commentary on the Epistle to the _____.

(*Romans*)

For Barth, philosophy became a tool for _____.

(biblical exegesis)

phy *cannot* put the Word of God in doubt, nor can it be used to confirm the Word of God.

Barth insisted that the nature of Christian Revelation is *Sui Generis* (Latin for "of itself"; in this case "clear without explanation"). In order to clarify the original meaning of the Bible in its *Sitz im Leben* (original context) Barth was willing to use historical criticism—both lower and higher—but after peeling off the rationalistic hull of the old classical criticism of the Continent. For Barth, the medium of revelation is the Bible.

Barth's theology makes reference to the dialectic of paradox in the existentialist mode of thought that he advocates. It is called the "theology of crisis," and teaches conversion after "the leap of faith." It insists upon the lordship of Jesus Christ. In the dialectic of Barthian theology, one *never grasps the absolute truth of God*; but the more experience, the more revelation, the more understanding or comprehension. Any statement about theology must be corrected by a paradoxical contradiction in order to become true.

Barth bothered little about apologetics. His critics claim that he has turned inward toward the Church and turned off the world.

In an attempt to evaluate the more lasting aspects of Barth's contributions to theology the following fact may be considered: he caused nearly all of his generation of theologians to re-examine their work or at least to defend it.

Schleiermacher's concessions to science and willingness to start at the point of man's condition in his theology directed to the intelligensia had released an *anthropocentric* trend in the theology and metaphysics of the nineteenth century. Barth had studied with some of the leaders of this trend, and his theology helped to stem the tide of *anthropocentric* emphasis. Of course Bultmann and other contemporaries did not agree. There are many who would say that Barth opened the way for theology to take its place again among the respectable sciences. For further in-depth information see the following:

David L. Mueller, *Karl Barth* (Waco: Word Books, Publisher, 1972).

John MacQuarrie, *Twentieth Century Religious Thought* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1963), pp. 321-24.

Daniel Jenkins, "Karl Barth," *A Handbook of Christian Theologians*, eds. Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman. (New York: Meridian Books: The World Publishing Co., 1965), pp. 396-409.

Along with Karl Barth in the Neo-Orthodox School,⁶ Emil Brunner, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Oscar Cullmann did not see many things like Barth. Emil Brunner, for instance, in contrast to Karl Barth, insisted upon a "natural theology" revealed in the Scriptures which he called "general revelation."⁷ The influence of Barthian thought has weakened in

⁶Or the Theology of the Word. Cf. Macquarrie, p. 318.

⁷J. Edward Humphrey, *Emil Brunner* (Waco: Word Books, 1976), p. 47.

Is the following statement true or false?

Barth used historical criticism only after removing the rationalism of the old classical criticism of the Continent. _____

(true)

Barth's theology makes reference to the _____

(dialectic of paradox)

Barth bothered little about _____

(apologetics)

Many think Barth opened the way for theology to take its place again among the respectable _____

(sciences)

the past fifteen years, but few men since Luther and Calvin have had as much influence on religious thought as Barth.

Existential philosophy figured seriously in the minds of the theologians of the Word. However, existentialism has appeared in many forms in the secular world in the philosophy of Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Martin Heidegger, Nicolai Berdyaev and Miguel de Unamuno y Jugo. In the world of religious thought, existentialism takes many forms also.

Rudolf Bultmann (1884-19—)

Rudolf Bultmann was born in Wiefelstede, Oldenburg, Germany, August 20, 1884. His father was a Lutheran pastor there. He was the grandson of missionaries to West Africa. Bultmann's maternal grandfather was a pastor in Baden. Bultmann studied at Rastede and Oldenburg and in 1903 went to Tübingen. Later he studied in Berlin and then on to Marburg. In 1910 he received his License in Theology from the University of Marburg. From 1912-1916 he lectured in New Testament at Marburg. He taught at Breslaw, Giessen, and finally. . . "succeeded his old teacher Wilhelm Heitmüller in the New Testament chair in Marburg."⁸ He remained in this position until he retired in 1951.

Bultmann has acknowledged on occasion some of his teachers, Johannes Weiss and Wilhelm Hermann. Weiss helped to guide Bultmann in his graduate study and doctoral preparation. Bultmann rejected the liberal school, but he never ceased to express his gratitude to Hermann. He credited serious influence to Adolf Harnack, the church historian, with influence upon his thought as well as Hermann Gunkel, a founder of *Formesepeschiste*. Karl Müller of Tübingen and Adolf Jülicher of Marburg made important contributions to his thought. Curiously, he never seems to mention Martin Kähler who wrote *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* in 1896; but Kähler's influence on Bultmann's distinction between *Historie* and *Geschichte* is drawn perhaps from Kähler as well as his affirmations about the *kerygma* of the New Testament.

Of all those who revolted against liberal theology in the early years of the twentieth century, perhaps Bultmann is one of the most difficult to interpret. This may be because he uses certain terms in German which are very hard to express in other languages, especially in English. Nevertheless, his distinction between *Historie* and *Geschichte* is helpful.⁹ "His view that *Geschichte* is personal meaningful history whose events continue to impinge on man's life is in keeping with the nature of biblical events."¹⁰

But the Apostle Paul insisted¹¹ on the authentication of the *Historie* kind of history, witnessed by the Apostles and others, to events like the cross and the resurrection. He

⁸Morris Ashcraft, *Rudolf Bultmann* (Waco: Word Books, 1972), p. 16.

⁹Ibid., p. 105ff.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹1 Corinthians 15:14-22.

A distinction is drawn between *Historie* and *Geschichte* by _____.

(Bultmann)

MATCH the following.

<i>Geschichte</i>	personal meaningful history whose events impinge on man's life
<i>Historie</i>	refers to authentic history, such as events like the Cross and the Resurrection

(Compare your answers with the text.)

said that if these were not a part of scientifically observable history, they were not ever to be real or meaningful to anyone. *Geschichte* allows for a faith based upon the "truth" that has been encased in "myth," according to Bultmann. He believed that if one could peel off the layers of myth that supposedly have grown around the historical fact, then the "truth" could be couched in modern language and be comprehensible to the modern scientific mind.

"A myth is a form of portraying happenings in the world as empirical events with transcendent causes."¹² The Virgin Birth of Jesus is an example, according to Bultmann, of mythical thinking. It affirms that the child was born in Palestine who would not have been born " . . . unless the divine cause of virginal conception was operative within the vexes of scientific and historical happenings—and indeed as a scientific, and historical event."¹³ A mixture of the supernatural and the natural . . . is always mythological and cannot be understood or meaningfully made use of by modern man.¹⁴

Bultmann is a Christian believer¹⁵ who does not think that the Bible is nonsense. He just wants to change the language of the Bible through "demythologizing" to the language of "modern man." A famous bishop¹⁶ says of Bultmann, "His heavy reliance on . . . (Heidegger's) Existentialism as a replacement for the mythological world-view is historically, and indeed geographically, conditioned. He finds it valuable as a substitute for the *contemporary generation in Germany*; but we are not bound to embrace it as the only alternative."¹⁷

Bultmann's presuppositions are often hidden; but they are always there, as they are in the thinking of everyone. He "understands mythology to be man's way of talking about God in human terms."¹⁸

The New Testament, for Bultmann, is a proclamation (*kerygma*) of the world-view of that age which is now obsolete and "mythological" at the beginning.

Bultmann believed that such a view as the New Testament presents cannot be accepted by the modern scientific mind, which sees nature and history as closed off from the supernatural.

Bultmann writes, " . . . To begin with the historical person of Jesus was very soon turned into a myth in primitive Christianity. Furthermore, the Gnostics also believed that the advent of the redeemer was a real event, and the source of the tradition enshrined in their worship and doctrine."¹⁹ By this he meant to imply that the Gospel of John has many Gnostic sources of information. He

¹²David E. Jenkins, *Guide to the Debate About God* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), p. 58.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶John A. T. Robinson—Bishop of Woolwich.

¹⁷John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), p. 35 (the italics are mine).

¹⁸Ashcraft, p. 50.

¹⁹Rudolf Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting*, translated R. H. Fuller (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), pp. 200, 201.

Is the following statement true or false?

One author defines myth in the following way:

"A myth is a form of portraying happenings in the world as empirical events with transcendent causes."

(true)

Bultmann understands "_____ to be man's way of talking about God in _____."

(mythology, human terms)

would have the reader believe that the "primitive myth" is what we actually read in the New Testament. What we have there, according to him, is an irreversible change of history into myth. Somewhere in the myth is hidden the *kerygma* or the true gospel. This may yet be recaptured, he believes, by the method of *demythologizing*.

It may seem that Bultmann has changed the Christian message completely to a philosophical proclamation of existentialism. He would be the first to deny such a thing. Christianity is different, he would say, because it proclaims the act of God in revealing Himself to sinners to make it possible for them to receive an authentic existence through faith. But, according to Bultmann, this act is not something out of the ancient past—something that happened "once for all"—but it is an existential "eschatological event." This is a "now" event which happens every time the Gospel is preached, or the sacraments are ministered—made real every single time a decision is made in authentic faith. Any minute of any day can become an "eschatological moment."

This writer agrees that Bultmann does not tell all the story, if indeed he ever tells any of it as God intended.

Paul Tillich (1886-1965)

Another person influenced by the teachings of Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer with regard to historicity was Paul Tillich. He was born in Germany (Prussia) to the family of a Lutheran pastor. He received a Ph.D at Breslau in 1911, a licentiate at Halle in 1912, and was a chaplain in World War I. He later taught at the universities of Berlin, Marburg, Dresden, Leipzig and Frankfurt. He was concerned deeply with philosophy, "... particularly German Idealism."²⁰ (Tillich wrote his doctoral dissertation and his licentiate thesis on Schelling.) When he was forty-seven years old, Tillich's career in Germany was terminated by Adolf Hitler. Tillich went to the United States to become a professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York. He later became a university professor at Harvard. Then he moved on to the University of Chicago where he remained until he died in 1965. He received fifteen doctorates²¹ and wrote many books. All his life, he preached powerfully—as his *The Shaking of the Foundations* attests, as well as his *The New Being*. Here, we can only examine what has been considered his more important work, his *Systematic Theology*.

This book in its field is unique in its lack of biblical references. He makes very few references to other theologians, but puts great emphasis upon *ontology*, *structures*, and the like. "The whole thing is more like philosophy than theology."²² His method is that of "correlation." He seeks to correlate the existential situation of man with the message of Christian revelation. He wishes to give some "Christian

²⁰Colin Brown, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (London: InterVarsity Press, 1973), p. 192.

²¹Ibid., p. 192.

²²Ibid., p. 193.

Is the following statement true or false?

According to Bultmann, the true history of the gospel events are covered with myths. The true message of the gospel can be recaptured by a method he calls demythologizing. _____

(true)

Paul Tillich's most important work is his _____

The book is unique in its field in its lack of _____ references.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

answers" to the questions of modern man. Some²³ have placed him in the Neo-Orthodoxy group (perhaps because of his friendship with Reinhold Niebuhr) and affirm his effort to present a defense of supernaturalism.

In the introduction to *Systematic Theology* Tillich begins by stating that religious concern is ultimate concern.²⁴ "The total concern is infinite: no moment of relaxation and rest is possible in the face of a religious concern which is ultimate, unconditional, total and infinite."²⁵ This is the object of theology—this is God. God, for the individual, is what he takes seriously without question or reservation.

"Other terms which Tillich uses for God are

being itself,
the power of being, and
*the ground of being.*²⁶

It is important to note that God is not a *being* nor a *thing*. God is beyond beings and things, He is *being itself*. A being or a thing is finite. "Even to regard God as the *highest being* would reduce him to the level of a creature . . . On the other hand, every finite being participates in *being itself*."²⁷ At this point, it may be that Tillich is extremely close to pantheism.

Since Tillich insists that *being itself* transcends existence, he rejects all "proofs" for the existence of God. The single value that Tillich allows for the traditional arguments of Anselm, Aquinas and others is that they sense both a distinction and a relationship between *finite* and *infinite being*.

In dealing with man and his sin, Tillich talks in terms of *being* and *estrangement from being*. Man is alienated or estranged from God, from other *beings*, and from himself. This is the source of the fierce tensions of modern life.²⁸ It is precisely here where the life and work of Christ enter. Christ is the person who overcomes *estrangement* from being, and "those who confess him are once more rightly related to the *ground of their being* . . . Jesus as the Christ is the bearer of the New Being."²⁹

Tillich's theology lays heavy emphasis upon a doctrine of Justification: There is nothing in man which enables God to accept him. He must accept that he is accepted; he must accept acceptance.

Tillich does not believe in the atonement in return for penal satisfaction. God is not satisfied like that. For Him, "Men receive forgiveness in spite of Christ's death, not because of it."³⁰ According to Tillich the biblical accounts of

List terms Tillich uses for God.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

At this point, Tillich may be very close to

(Pantheism)

In regard to sin, Tillich talks about _____
and _____ from being.

(being, estrangement)

Tillich's theology lays heavy emphasis upon a doctrine of _____.

(justification)

²³Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 11.

²⁴Ibid., p. 12.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Colin Brown, p. 194.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 194, 195.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., p. 196.

³⁰Ibid., p. 197.

the death of Jesus are "often contradictory legendary reports . . . to ask about the molecules of the physical body of Jesus is to compound absurdity with blasphemy."³¹ He believes that Jesus was restored to the dignity of the Christ in the minds of the disciples.³²

Tillich differs with Barth, accepting natural or general theology. He differs from Bultmann on the issue of breaking symbols in demythologizing.

David Jenkins says, "As *ultimate concern*, 'ground of our being' and 'the new being' are prominent phrases in much of the current debate and as the phrases come from Tillich it is to Tillich that we must now turn. Nonetheless I must confess that I find Tillich considerably more debatable than God, and that my guess is that his system will turn out to be unviable, and his obscurities to conceal not profundity but muddle."³³

Tillich, the man, was three: he was an eloquent preacher; he was an abstract thinker; and he was far from ethically orthodox in his personal life.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.

³³David Jenkins, p. 89.

Tillich differs with B_____ and
B_____.

(Barth, Bultmann)

List three areas of Tillich's life given by the author.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Home Study Exercise

Basic activity (Levels 1, 2, and 3). Read the study guide and answer the following questions:

1. Outline briefly Karl Barth's life up to his ordination. Where did he serve as pastor?

2. According to Barth, what is the task of theology?

3. How did Barth come to write his celebrated *Römerbrief*?

4. How did Barth use philosophy in relation to faith?

5. How did Barth make use of historical criticism?
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6. Explain Barth's "dialectic of paradox."
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-
7. State what you consider to be Barth's major contribution to twentieth-century thought.
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8. Define Bultmann's *Historie and Geschichte*.
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-
-
9. How does Bultmann use "myth"?
-
-
-
10. What does Bultmann mean by "demythologizing"?
-
-
-
11. What was Tillich's most important work? What makes this work unique?
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-
-
12. What is the author's assessment of Tillich's thought on "being itself"?
-
-
-
13. How does Tillich deal with the question of sin?
-
-
-
14. How does Tillich differ from Barth and Bultmann?
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-
-
15. What is the author's assessment of Tillich's life?
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-
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Supplementary activity (*Levels 2 and 3*). Read pages 181-200 of Colin Brown, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* and answer the following:

1. What is the underlying philosophy of the works of Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger and Albert Camus?
2. How has Existentialism affected the theology of Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich? Why are they so different in some aspects of their thought?
3. What is the meaning of "myth"?
4. What has been the influence of Schleiermacher on Tillich?

Advanced activity (*Level 3*).

1. What is Bultmann's method of "demythologizing"?
2. Explain Tillich's "Ultimate Concern."
3. What did Barth mean by the "wholly other" and the "humanity of God"?
4. Why is Emil Brunner unique in his use of *natural* or *universal theology*?

Seminar Discussion

1. Why did Barth return to the Bible and reject *liberal theology*?
2. What is real in Bultmann's theology?
3. Why is Paul Tillich accused of pantheism by some?