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From Modernity to Post-Modernity: The Apologetic Legacy of Paul Tillich

Abstract

Paul Tillich, dubbed an “apostle to the intellectuals,” was one of the twentieth-century’s influential and infamous theologians. Tillich’s apologetic of doubt, method of correlation, and non-traditional lifestyle challenged the cultural and religious norms of his day. The study of Paul Tillich’s theology provides perspective on the origins of subjective apologetics and process theology. His focus on ontology made his works accessible and famous. It put the human at the center of the process as they reasoned up to God instead of accepting unquestioned authoritative doctrines. By embracing existential doubt, he connected to the masses by appealing to the “being” and “meaning” questions of life. His “theology of culture” united the temporal and the divine, drawing from psychology, art, and other mediums. This technique was revolutionary at the time, but it is now commonplace in the pluralistic twenty-first century. As someone who lived his life physically, emotionally, and spiritually “on the border,” he inevitably strayed too far from orthodoxy. Christian theologians and apologists object to Tillich’s appropriation and changing of central tenants of classic Christian theology. Future generations, however, can build upon the cultural dialogues he started while staying true to orthodoxy. Apologists of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century may have had to address some of the nontraditional theories proposed by Tillich, but they owe him a debt of gratitude when using his approach to give biblical answers to cultural questions.

Keywords

Christianity, Paul Tillich, apologetics, theology, philosophy, culture, doubt, faith.

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Introduction

Seventy years ago, Paul Tillich released the first of his influential three-volume *Systematic Theology*. During his lifetime, some argued this magnum opus “could go down in history alongside the systems of Aquinas and Hegel . . . it will stand in the history of philosophical-theologies as one of the distinct systems and another bold attempt to wed the two sciences.”¹ Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson also maintained that Paul Tillich’s contribution to twentieth-century theology “is comparable to Barth’s in terms of overall influence and impact,” giving him the title “apostle to the intellectuals.”² The study of Paul Tillich’s theology provides perspective on the origins of subjective apologetics and process theology. His focus on ontology made his works accessible and famous. It put the human at the center of the process as they reasoned up to God instead of accepting unquestioned authoritative doctrines. By embracing existential doubt, he connected to the masses by appealing to the “being” and “meaning” questions of life. His “theology of culture” united the temporal and the divine, drawing from psychology, art, and other mediums. This technique was revolutionary at the time, but it is now commonplace in the pluralistic twenty-first century. Born of late modernity, Tillich not only faced difficult contemporary issues, but he also leveraged them to have spiritual conversations. This movement foreshadowed the self-focused, existential nature of American culture. It also laid the groundwork for the seeker and emergent movements of the twenty-first century. Tillich pioneered using Christian revelation to answer ontological and existential questions. He felt that most questions revolved around the nature of being or living a meaningful life. Paul Tillich addressed apologetic questions posed by modernity by leveraging existential doubt in his “method of correlation.”

Modernity

Roger Olson describes modernity as the cultural ethos stemming from the enlightenment and “the cultural water Western people swim in.”³ James Byrne added that modern thinkers felt they were in a “privileged position to judge the

¹ R. Allan Killen, *The Ontological Theology of Paul Tillich* (Kampen: Kok, 1956), 9.

² Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *20th-Century Theology: God & the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 114.

³ Roger E. Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology: From Reconstruction to Deconstruction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 23.

errors of the past and fashion the achievements of the future.”⁴ Walter Lippman coined the phrase “acids of modernity” in *A Preface to Morals*.⁵ These acids eroded the doctrinal consensus of beliefs that traditional Christianity had held for centuries. This period saw the rise of *secularism*, the belief that life can be lived successfully without God or religion.⁶ This era saw science, philosophy, romanticism, existentialism, and epistemology critique the church and Christian doctrine. The emergence of deism also offered religion free of doctrinal conviction. Byrne summed up modernism’s influence on Christianity:

The nature of Christianity was up for grabs. Was Christianity primarily a personal faith in Jesus Christ, loyalty to the pope, membership in a particular church, a commitment to the moral values of the gospel, and the over-complicated version of a simple message, or just a very big mistake? All of these views and many others can be found in the enlightenment.⁷

Twentieth-century modernism challenged the foundations of virtually every conventional norm. Church leadership was ill-prepared to address the challenges and disruptions associated with the modern era. Questions related to rapidly changing ideas and values of the day went largely unanswered. These circumstances formed the intellect of one of the great thinkers from this era who would accept the challenge of answering culture’s questions with his method of correlation.

Biography

Paul Tillich was born in Starzeddel, Germany. He attended the elementary school in Bad Schonfliess, where his father, a strict Lutheran minister, served as diocese superintendent. His mother died of cancer when he was seventeen, leaving him devastated. Following a time in boarding school, where he sought Scripture to curb his loneliness, he graduated from high school in Berlin. Tillich

⁴ James M. Byrne, *Religion and the Enlightenment: From Descartes to Kant* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), ix.

⁵ Walter Lippmann, *A Preface to Morals* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 52-68.

⁶ Roger E. Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology: From Reconstruction to Deconstruction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 26.

⁷ James M. Byrne, *Religion and the Enlightenment: From Descartes to Kant* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 14.

attended the University of Berlin, the University of Tübingen, and the University of Halle-Wittenberg. His education culminated in a Doctor of Philosophy degree from the University of Breslau and his Licentiate of Theology from the Halle-Wittenberg. Tillich's dissertation featured the philosophy of Friedrich Schelling, who would significantly influence Tillich's work.⁸ In 1912, Tillich received ordination as a Lutheran Minister in the Province of Brandenburg. In 1914, he joined the Imperial German Army as a chaplain. This period profoundly affected him as he experienced the horrors of war. He suffered two nervous breakdowns and underwent a severe crisis of faith and doubt that transformed his view of God.⁹ Compounding this trauma was the infidelity of his first wife with a close friend while he was deployed. After the war, Tillich returned to Germany and began his academic career. He also continued the expansion of his cultural horizons. He immersed himself in the Berlin creative scene, interacting with writers, artists, and other creatives. He remarried in 1924 and continued his academic career until Adolph Hitler deposed him in 1933. He resumed his career in America at Union Theological Seminary, Harvard Divinity School, and the University of Chicago, where he was an influential theologian. His published works, *Dynamics of Faith*, *The Courage to Be*, and his three-volume *Systematic Theology*, serve as his legacy to the theological and philosophical community.

Tillich's Compatibility with Modernity

Paul Tillich drew upon his life experiences as a war veteran, socialite, refugee, American expatriate, and professor to inform his apologetic method. His method reflected the perspective of a man who had lived among regular people as opposed to an overly-theoretical sheltered professor. Tillich had much in common with his generation, and he answered the questions of his day. His autobiography, *On the Boundary*, alludes to the geography where he grew up (border of Prussia and Germany) as well as the way he lived his life. He wrote, "the boundary is the best place for acquiring knowledge."¹⁰ Likewise, moderns grew up in a time of transition socially, ideologically, and technologically. They often felt pulled between the past that was and the future that awaited them. Moderns emerged in an age that not only transitioned America to a global worldview but also changed

⁸ James C Dennison, *Why We Think the Way We Do: A History of Western Worldview*, vol. 1 (Dallas, TX: God Issues Publications, 2008), 43.

⁹ R. Allan Killen, *The Ontological Theology of Paul Tillich* (Kampen: Kok, 1956), 32.

¹⁰ Paul Tillich, *On the Boundary: An Autobiographical Sketch* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1936), 13.

the way that human beings worked, learned, and related with one another. They found themselves disoriented by social chaos and eager to find stability in the twentieth century. Tillich's experience as a chaplain paralleled modern disillusionment. The horrors of World War I led Tillich to question his nationalism, innocence, and spirituality. Experiences such as witnessing destruction and death and the task of burying soldiers chipped away at his idealism as a clergyman and as a Lutheran, a highly nationalistic denomination.¹¹ He forsook nineteenth-century humanism because the world showed him that humanity is innately destructive.¹² He also abandoned the Lutheran nationalism that taught him that a personal God would intervene in worldly circumstances and save the day.¹³ This weariness related to moderns who were disappointed with the promises of their upbringing and who grew up in a tumultuous era that questioned all knowledge. World Wars and cultural change upended existing powers and nations, creating a century of constant adaptation and confusion.

Tillich's lifetime also saw the reemergence of existentialism. This shift in worldview could be attributed to a response to the fallout of two world wars. Realism emerged from the ashes of Enlightenment optimism that was crushed by world events such as war, poverty, and forced migrations. Existentialism provided theologians with responses to the tragedies of modernism. Tillich answered theological, philosophical, and cultural questions from the existential point of view as a means of making Christianity relevant to changing times.

Tillich's complicated personal life also resonated with a generation struggling to find love and fulfillment. Spurned by his first wife for a good friend during the war, Tillich understood the heartbreak of betrayal. In his second wife's biography, her recollections of their open marriage, his drug experimentation, and countercultural dabblings describe someone questioning societal and cultural restrictions.¹⁴ Moderns, likewise, renegotiated marital relationships, social causes, and the political landscape.

With a life defined by war, an unconventional personal life, countercultural experimentation, and unorthodox political ideologies, Tillich resembled a generation dissatisfied by the norms and seeking a spirituality that could answer their complex questions within their cultural framework. The twentieth century saw humanity move from a primitive agrarian existence into

¹¹ Charles P. Henderson, *God and Science: The Death and Rebirth of Theism* (Atlanta, GA: J. Knox Press, 1986), 112-113.

¹² *Ibid.*, 112-113.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 112-113.

¹⁴ Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1974), 241.

world wars, societal changes, political unrest, and technological advances that questioned the foundation of western culture. Tillich bravely engaged these influences head-on and attempted to interact with skeptics and doubters who, themselves, were in the throes of countercultural forces and spiritual despair.

Method of Correlation

In 1945, Tillich said, “It is a well-known fact that the process of secularization has affected all of the great religions.”¹⁵ This phenomenon intensified the need for apologetics. Tillich’s approach to theology and apologetics “correlates” questions and answers, situation and message, and human existence over divine manifestation. Karl Barth and other contemporaries favored Kerygmatic theology that emphasized the unchangeable truth of the message (kerygma) against the changing demands of the situation (cultural context). Tillich, however, favored an approach that answered pressing cultural questions. In his systematic theology, Tillich noted that the apologetic theologian searches for the “common ground” beneath the feet of those who articulate the faith of those whom faith would speak. Tillich took exception to his Kerygmatic contemporaries, alleging that they projected faith “from the mountaintop.” He adds that the Christian message could not be “thrown like a stone” at its target.¹⁶ Tillich wrote, “Apologetics, therefore, is an omnipresent element and not a special section of systematic theology.”¹⁷

Tillich also encouraged arguments because they could break through both skepticism and dogmatism and reorient focus to the Holy Spirit. His apologetic theory thrived when accurately answering the specific questions. Tillich detested the futility of a faith that answers the questions no one is asking; he saw the absolute necessities of making connections between several dimensions of experience. For this reason, Tillich oriented his theology at the intersection of the secular and the sacred. He implemented art, music, philosophy, and other mediums into spiritual discussions. In so doing, he made faith accessible to skeptics and leveraged new thought for theological means. This method also encouraged Tillich to have conversations across different disciplines; he interfaced with the great thinkers of his day such as Karl Marx and Albert

¹⁵ Paul Tillich, *The World Situation* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1965), 42.

¹⁶ Wilhelm Pauck, *Paul Tillich: His Life and Thought* (Wipf and Stock Publisher, 1977), 8.

¹⁷ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology . . . Paul Tillich*, Vol. 1 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 31.

Einstein. Most notably, Tillich separated the science of psychoanalysis from the atheism of its founder, Sigmund Freud, and used its powerful tools of analysis in rebuilding the faith that Freud so confidently assigned to oblivion.

Borders defined Tillich's life. He grew up in a border town and visited many lands, so he adopted the "boundary line" as an image that defined his stance in the world of thought. He walked a fine line between church and secular culture, politics and philosophy, and science and theology. Tillich's method of correlation demonstrated contextual compatibility with modernism, and his "answering theology" proved useful in communicating with a generation that is put off by conventional methods.

Tillich's Apologetic of Faith and Doubt

In his book, *Dynamics of Faith*, Tillich states, "There is hardly a word in the religious language, both theological and popular, which is subject to more misunderstandings, distortions, and questionable definitions than the word 'faith.'"¹⁸ Tillich differentiates between faith and belief: "The most common misinterpretation of faith is to consider it an act of knowledge that has a small degree of evidence."¹⁹ He qualifies that as belief. If faith is understood as the belief that something is true, then doubt is incompatible with the act of faith. If faith is understood as being ultimately concerned, then doubt is a necessary element in it.

Tillich introduces his term "ultimate concern." This concern trumps all other concerns in a person's life, thereby giving them a sense of meaning and a goal to achieve. His ontological view of God was above all existence. God is the ground of all being, and He should be humanity's ultimate concern. Because God is the essence of all that is, any other object placed as our ultimate concern is considered idolatry. Tillich does not separate sacred from secular. In his mind, everyone has an ultimate concern. Hence, everyone has faith. The object of that ultimate concern then becomes the critical issue that an apologist must answer. For Tillich, that which gives meaning to and is of ultimate concern in life actually is God. Humans are separated and estranged from what is meaningful in life—that which is of ultimate existential concern—which leads to anxiety, despair, and death.²⁰ Tillich identifies three uses of what he calls methodical, skeptical, and

¹⁸ Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1957), xxi.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 31.

²⁰ Paul Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), 97.

existential. Existential doubt is implicit in every act of faith. A person's view of faith is continually challenged by existential doubt and accepted again through courage. His view of faith is non-static; it is much more dynamic as people risk belief in their ultimate concern.

Apologetic of Doubt

Tillich embraced doubts that he experienced as a young man and in his conversations with Eric Harder, his father's assistant, and moreover, those doubts that were left over from his war experiences as a chaplain. World War I proved influential on Tillich. The nationalistic fervor and spiritual enthusiasm over the opportunity to serve both God and country died on the battlegrounds of the war. His compatriots in the military who "shared the popular belief in a nice God who would make everything turn out for the best" were incompatible with the horrors of war that he experienced.²¹

Tillich wrote, "Doubt isn't the opposite of faith; it is an element of faith." His apologetic of doubt served as the central teaching point that bridged skepticism toward belief in God. This method, supplemented with more orthodox theological sources and relevant cultural data, develops a philosophy of apologetics that will give skeptics a belief that can weather their "existential crisis" and reorient them toward matters of faith. Tillich identified three anxieties: fate and death, guilt and condemnation, and meaninglessness and emptiness. Fate and death deal with humanity's mortality. Human beings who do not believe in God face greater stress over their existence. Guilt and condemnation deal with societal expectations and restrictions. Tillich, himself, discarded many of the cultural expectations of his day. Finally, meaninglessness and emptiness deal with the idolatry of not making God our ultimate concern. Tillich struggled with this sense of meaning. His work *The Courage to Be* is his existentialist attempt to solve Kierkegaard's problems of anxiety, guilt, and despair with an ontology of being and nonbeing.²² Tillich's apologetic of doubt gives Christians and non-Christians alike permission to process their faith. This existential perspective gives each person an opportunity to live a passionate, examined faith rather than a cultural religious experience. Tillich encourages a faith that is experienced daily by the believer and is practical in life's challenges. His existential leanings describe the man passionate about his views as opposed to someone who callously performs rituals to satisfy their religion.

²¹ Ibid, 40-41.

²² R. Allan Killen, *The Ontological Theology of Paul Tillich* (Kampen: Kok, 1956), 52.

Tillich suggested five guidelines for practical apologetics. The first guideline includes believers and nonbelievers in the same audience because they both are at risk of idolatry. Tillich's suggestion that believers and unbelievers share the same experiences and help each other along is a wise one that has been emulated by modern churches. The seeker movement of the late twentieth century welcomed non-Christians into the worship experience so they could process their emotions and make a decision on their own with the full support of the congregation and other Christians. The second guideline seeks to break down idols by ending the suppression of doubt. This guideline likely has to do with Tillich's German heritage, in which questioning was not encouraged. Suppressing or ignoring doubt can lead to later consequences while acknowledging and working through doubt produces a stronger faith. The third guideline affirms faith without aiming to rid doubt. Doubt is inevitable and even helpful for spiritual growth. Christians who expect to completely rid themselves of doubt inevitably wrestle with their faith. The fourth guideline asserts that apologetics should bring Christians and non-Christians into faith communities. For both Christians and non-Christians to grow spiritually, they cannot be in faith communities that are not diverse in thought. The fifth and final guideline is to work toward apologetics by remaining open to doubt. Making peace with doubt means making God our ultimate concern. Only through courage and faith can Christians use doubt as a means to embrace faith.

While Paul Tillich's theology was unconventional, he possessed admirable missiological and apologetic convictions. Tillich's desire to interface with new ideas, explore other academic disciplines, explore different cultures, and examine controversial political models inspired future Christian thinkers to do likewise. Christians cannot stay silent regarding social questions that emerge from society.

Biblical Response to the Handling of the Problem

Tillich provided excellent questions, but critics assert that he failed to respond to them adequately. In appealing to the masses and the culture, Tillich conceded too much of Christian orthodoxy. Millard Erickson recognizes the difference between "translating" the gospel and "transforming" it to contextualize the faith.²³ Tillich's apologetic method did the latter and transformed Christianity into worldly philosophy. The issue was rooted in his method of correlation. Kenneth Hamilton critiqued Tillich's method of correlation by stating that it takes nothing from the Christian message and everything from the ontological system

²³ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids (MI): Baker Book House, 1983), 112-20.

of thought from which it begins.²⁴ Tillich did not correlate questions and answers but interpreted the language of the Christian faith to make it conform to the preconceived ontological system.²⁵

Tillich's views were consistent with the likes of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and Rauschenbusch. Killen argues, "He bases his view of sin upon a consideration of the conditions which he finds existence rather than upon the view of sin given in the Bible."²⁶ Tillich defined the Kingdom of God as a progressive unfolding of the universal human ideal within historical existence that ultimately saves humanity.²⁷ While Tillich's ground of being seems like a variation on God's sovereignty, it seems closer to pantheism than to Christianity. Tillich's concept of transcendence also seems unintelligible. Mark Kline Taylor suggested that Tillich risked stretching the meaning of transcendence beyond recognition.²⁸

Tillich's theology was sharply criticized for his ontological, Christological, and soteriological views. Ontologically, Tillich's God is not personal. Tillich's work is much more philosophical than theological. He makes references to Christian concepts in generalities, but his references to Scripture and the major tenants of Christianity are largely absent from his work. Tillich stated, "History has shown that the most terrible crimes against love have been committed in the name of fanatically defended doctrines."²⁹ Tillich used this line of reasoning to sidestep scriptural or doctrinal accountability. First Peter 3:15, an oft-quoted apologetic Scripture, encourages believers to be ready to "give an account for the hope within you."³⁰ While Tillich did engage culture, he did so without the

²⁴ Kenneth Hamilton, *The System and the Gospel: A Critique of Paul Tillich* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 124.

²⁵ Ibid, 124.

²⁶ R. Allan Killen, *The Ontological Theology of Paul Tillich* (Kampen: Kok, 1956), 185.

²⁷ Jeremy Bouma, *Reimagining the Kingdom: The Generational Development of Liberal Kingdom Theology from Schleiermacher to McLaren* (Theoklesia, 2012), 142.

²⁸ Mark Kline Taylor, *Paul Tillich: Theologian of the Boundaries* (London: Collins, 1987), 23.

²⁹ Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1957), 13.

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authority of Scripture. It is difficult to render a scriptural critique of Tillich's work because he rarely provides biblical references for his teachings. This oversight reduces most of Tillich's work to philosophical musings that lead to a hollow, self-focused theology.

Sadly, Christological shortcomings abound in Tillich's work. The gospel as understood by evangelicals is widely dismissed for philosophical conversations about an ultimate concern. Scripture is not a priority as he gives equal authority to church history and history of religion and culture. Tillich does not affirm a historical Jesus in his teachings. "The search for the historical Jesus was an attempt to discover a minimum of reliable facts about the man Jesus of Nazareth, in order to provide a safe foundation for the Christian faith. This attempt was a failure."³¹

Without the cross, there is no forgiveness of sins. Making God one's "ultimate concern" is noble, but it leaves questions unanswered and omits the power and beauty of Christianity. The experience of the person is given the highest priority as opposed to the object of faith and worship. He makes a compelling case for theism more than for Christianity. Martin Buber calls Tillich's position "transtheistic," while the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* states that his theology is closer to atheism or pantheism than to Christianity. Leonard F. Wheat issued possibly the most vigorous critique in his work, *Paul Tillich's Dialectical Humanism: Unmasking the God Above God*. He states, "Tillich is an atheist in the broadest sense of the word."³²

In some ways, Tillich's apologetic method created the need for other scholars to counter his ideas. As an apologist, Tillich served as a model of attempting to answer culture's questions. Unfortunately, by design, his works are now mostly obsolete. Other scholars now answer culture's questions with greater biblical fidelity. Tillich's wife, Hannah, stated that Tillich had transformed real life into "the gold of abstraction"—referring to him as a "King Midas of the spirit."³³ Upon closer inspection and with the benefit of hindsight, Tillich's work continues to lose its luster. Separated from his time and setting, the positive that remains is a towering intellect pondering life's important questions. Without doctrinal and scriptural foundations, however, is the tragic legacy of a man who asked insightful questions but sought answers in the wrong places.

³¹ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology . . . Paul Tillich*, Vol. 2 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 105.

³² L. F. Wheat, *Paul Tillich's Dialectical Humanism: Unmasking the God above God* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins P., 1970), 20.

³³ Tillich, *From Time to Time*, 241.

Conclusion

Charles P Henderson Jr. compared Tillich to the biblical character of Abraham. Abraham followed the call of a God into an uncertain future based solely on his faith in God's covenant. Tillich's life paralleled Abraham in that he lived as a spiritual pilgrim uprooted from his native country, faith traditions, and family conventions. His nomadic existence spanned continents, relationships, cultures, and philosophies. None of Tillich's experimentation with drugs, politics, or bohemian vices satisfied his spiritual desire to have a deeper understanding of God. His legacy is his efforts to make a God comprehensible to humanity amid a skeptical age of science. While he rejected classical arguments for God's existence, his answering theology, apologetic of doubt, and method of correlation served as a lifeline for twentieth-century people caught amid a tumultuous and unstable era in history. His tragic and turbulent life experiences related to seekers who weathered their disappointments and skepticism. Tillich's lifelong Christian pilgrimage is admirable. His spiritual resilience stood in contrast to those who forsook theism during times of difficulty and disillusionment. While other great thinkers of his time dismissed theism favoring new intellectual pursuits, Tillich remained resolute in his belief in God and instead attempted to use culture to point to the supernatural.

Tillich used philosophy as a bridge between science and religion. His insightful questions connected faith that was viewed as too lofty and disconnected from everyday people living amid significant cultural and religious shifts. These questions sought common ground between those who articulate and seek faith. Tillich embraced his doubt and, in so doing, inspired others to work through their doubts instead of giving up on their faith. Despite his towering intellect, Tillich was well-liked by the masses. His engaging personality overcame any cultural or language barriers associated with being a middle-aged German immigrant.

Tillich's theological legacy, however, is more troublesome. As someone who lived his life physically, emotionally, and spiritually "on the border," he inevitably strayed too far from orthodoxy. Christian theologians and apologists object to Tillich's appropriation and changing of central tenants of classic Christian theology. While some of his conclusions about ontology are understandable considering his context, he compromised his views enough that they were unrecognizable to the historic Christian faith. His neglect of Christology and avoidance of doctrine jeopardized his legacy because these omissions could alienate and confuse more people than he could attract with this approach. Another blight on Tillich's legacy is his distinctly modern approach. Tillich's style of apologetics included planned obsolescence that expired at the end of his age. As modernity gave away to postmodernism, his influence waned as his questions and commentary lost relevance.

Nonetheless, Tillich's legacy includes generations of Christian apologists who attempted to answer his questions and reason from a cultural context but with orthodox answers. Tillich came from an age where the church leaned on its authority and asked people to believe without questioning. Tillich was part of a movement that modeled wrestling with the difficult questions of the day and interacting with disciplines such as art, science, and the humanities. Future generations can build upon the cultural dialogues he started while staying true to orthodoxy. Apologists of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century may have had to address some of the nontraditional theories proposed by Tillich, but they owe him a debt of gratitude when using his approach to give biblical answers to cultural questions.

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