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Paul Tillich and the Academic Culture of Modernity

WESSEL STOKER

Is theology a science? The scientific nature of theology is the subject of a great deal of discussion at present. The view articulated by Paul Tillich on this issue is relevant for that discussion. For Tillich, theology is a public concern. Theology's field of attention includes not only the church but society and the academy as well. Here we want to look at Tillich's theology in relation to the academy, to academic culture. In his view, the task of theology is to mediate between the Christian faith and the experience of individuals and groups.¹ Does this mediation obtain also for the relation between faith and academics or science? Can Christian theology be a science and thus part of the academic culture? In the first half of the previous century logical positivism was the dominant epistemological theory, not only in Europe but also in the Anglo-American world.² This view of science and knowledge wanted little to do with theology and metaphysics. According to the manifesto drawn up in 1929, *Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung: Der Wiener Kreis*, it was even promoted a scientific worldview that held that, for science, there were no unsolvable riddles:

“Neatness and clarity are striven for, and dark distances and unfathomable depths rejected. In science there are no ‘depths’; there is surface everywhere: all experience forms a complex network, which cannot always be surveyed and can often be grasped only in parts. Everything is accessible to man; man is measure of all things [...] The scientific world-conception knows no *unsolvable riddle*.”³

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- 1 P. Tillich, *The Protestant Era* (1948), in: Id., *Main Works VI*, ed. by G. Hummel, Berlin/New York: De Gruyter & Evangelisches Verlagswerk 1992, 289 (MW); see also P. Tillich, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. by R. Albrecht, Stuttgart Evangelisches Verlagswerk (1959-1975), 7, 13 (GW).
 - 2 A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
 - 3 *Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung: Der Wiener Kreis* has no official author. See O. Neurath, *Gesammelte philosophische und methodologische Schriften I*, ed. by R. Haller & H. Rutte, Wien: Verlag Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky 1981, 305 (English O. Neurath: *Empiricism and Sociology*, Dordrecht: Kluwer 1973, 306).

Following the model of physics, logical positivism viewed science as unified science (Einheitswissenschaft). The attempt was made to express the different areas of science in a common and mutually comprehensible language. Only such a unified science can establish what is true or not true; empirical verification is therefore the norm, which is why this theory of epistemology is also called logical empiricism. Only statements that can be empirically verified are meaningful. Theology, therefore, cannot be a science because theological statements are meaningless, i.e. cannot be empirically verified.

Tillich had written his *Das System der Wissenschaften nach Gegenständen und Methoden* six years before this manifesto appeared (1923). Unlike logical positivism, he distinguished between the sciences and includes theology among the human sciences (die Geistes- oder Normwissenschaften). Theology is a theonomic metaphysics that belongs to the human sciences.⁴ His philosophy of meaning shows that the coherence of meaning is guaranteed by an unconditional meaning.⁵ He thus points to the theonomic character of knowledge, the notion that thinking is rooted in the unconditional as ground of meaning and as abyss. When speaking about God theology discusses in an explicit way that which is an implicit presupposition of knowing. Tillich thus wants to show that theology is possible as science.⁶ The later Tillich (Tillich after emigrating to the US in 1933) would develop his view of theology in the first part of *Systematic Theology* and emphasize its church character. In *Systematic Theology* the postulate of the unconditional functions as a presupposition of understanding of spiritual things (Geisteswissenschaft) and in philosophy of religion (ST I, 12).⁷ He no longer considers a Christian theologian as a scientific theologian in the ordinary sense of “scientific” (ST I, 13).

Two worlds – that of scientific culture and that of Christian theology – clashed with each other in Tillich’s time. During the 1960s the scientific climate slowly changed and logical positivism was considered untenable. But Tillich did not experience this changed climate, which has been much more favourable for theology since the 1960s.

4 P. Tillich, *Das System der Wissenschaften nach Gegenständen und Methoden* (1923), GW I, 274f. (MW I, 247f).

5 P. Tillich, *Religionsphilosophie* (1925), GW I, 318 (MW IV, 132).

6 P. Tillich, *Auf der Grenze* (1962), GW XII, 35f.

7 P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1-3, London: James Nisbet 1968. The numbers in the text refer to his *Systematic Theology* (ST), and to the three volumes (I-III), rather than the five parts.

I will investigate how the later Tillich viewed theology as science and the relationship between theology and science in his *Systematic Theology* (1951). Because this has to do with his view of theology in relation to the dominant scientific climate, we should look at the following topics.⁸ How does he account for theology to those who are outside the circle of theology (par. 1.1) and for the Christian character of his theology as church theology to the faith community (par. 1.2)? How does he deal with the academic/scientific demand for verification (par. 1.3) and with the criticism of faith and theology made by science (par. 1.4)? I will thereby also refer to his use of the prevailing view of rationality. I will subsequently explore how Tillich's concern that theology be a public, academic affair can better come into its own in the new climate of the more recent philosophy of science.

1. Tillich on the Scientific Character of Theology

1.1 The Postulate of the Unconditional: The Foundation of the Human Sciences

How does Tillich account for his view of theology over against the sciences? He points to the epistemological circle of the human sciences and philosophy of religion adds the smaller, theological, circle of Christian theology to it. The epistemological circle rests on the unconditional that is the foundation of knowledge in the human sciences. Tillich thus relies on a train of thought he had developed earlier in his *Das System der Wissenschaften* and in other writings from the 1920s. He inquires into the condition of knowledge and, like the Augustinian-metaphysical tradition, finds that in the unconditional, which he calls God. The unconditional, the idea of God, is the foundation of knowledge; it precedes our theoretical judgement and is its basis. But how do we have knowledge of God? God comes from God and that is why we cannot come to him via the world, via the conditional, as Tillich explains in connection with the concept of religion. To attempt to do so would turn God into a correlate with the world and

⁸ In addition to positivism, Tillich also cites Neo-Kantianism, phenomenology, and pragmatism. Because of logical positivism's dominant position, I will limit myself to that.

would merge him with it.⁹ There is no indirect or mediate path to God – only the immediate path of the intuition (Intuition). People appear to be aware of the unconditional, of God. “Certainty about God is certainty about the unconditional contained in and grounding the I’s certainty about itself”.¹⁰ The unconditional, the idea of God, is its own proof: we are immediately aware of it.

This postulate of the unconditional is described in Tillich’s works in different contexts, always with the attribute “immediacy” of the intuition.¹¹ Thus, the later Tillich calls this the ontological principle of the philosophy of religion according to which the human being has an immediate sense of God that precedes all division and interaction between subject and object in science. Like Augustine, he calls God truth. “Veritas is presupposed in every philosophical argument; and veritas is God”.¹² According to him, the unconditional, being itself, and the biblical God converge.

In his *Systematic Theology* Tillich shows that the foundation of knowledge for theology, along with the human sciences and philosophy of religion, is the unconditional. He calls it the mystical a priori:

“[...] [A]n immediate experience of something ultimate in value and being of which one can become intuitively aware [...] a mystical a priori, an awareness of something that transcends the cleavage between subject and object.” (ST I, 11f.)

This circle of the unconditional is operative in the human sciences: “every understanding of spiritual things (Geisteswissenschaft) is circular” (ST I, 12). The unconditional can only be encountered if it is already present. Thus, Tillich wants to make clear that the idea of God is already implied in knowledge in the human sciences. And thus this postulate of the unconditional can function as a gateway to Christian theology which speaks explicitly about God. This legitimizes theology for those outside the theological circle. That is, indeed, a preliminary and incomplete legitimation because Tillich will later base Christian theology on the (Christian) logos

9 P. Tillich, *Die Überwindung des Religionsbegriffs in der Religionsphilosophie* (1922), GW I, 369 (MW IV, 75).

10 P. Tillich, *Die Überwindung des Religionsbegriffs*, GW I, 378 (MW IV, 82); P. Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, MW V, 253 (GW VIII, 143).

11 P. Tillich, *Two Types of Philosophy of Religion* (1946), MW IV, 296 (GW V, 131).

12 P. Tillich, *Two Types of Philosophy of Religion*, MW IV, 290 (GW V, 124); P. Tillich, *Kairos und Logos*, GW IV, 54f (MW I, 278).

doctrine. Before looking at the theological circle, I will first comment on the postulate of the unconditional.

Tillich here makes use of the metaphysical tradition in which the concept of God has a foundational function in epistemology. With Grube, I wonder if this postulate can do the job of giving Christian theology an epistemological legitimation.¹³ My questions here arise because of the following concerns.

1. In itself, in my view, a metaphysical concept of God can be reconciled with the personal biblical God.¹⁴ The problem here is that there is no direct line from the unconditional to the biblical, personal God. That demand has to be made because this postulate serves as a gateway to Christian theological discourse about the biblical God. In the Christian faith, God is indeed the starting point for knowledge and of truth, but – and that is the issue here – can the postulate of the unconditional function as an objective given in epistemology?

2. Epistemologies are usually formulated now without such a metaphysical foundation. Kant no longer based knowledge of phenomenal objects in the concept of God but in the transcendental subject. In later phenomenology since Heidegger the gulf between subject and object was bridged without appealing to the concept of the “mystical a priori” because the life world of human beings was the starting point and scientific knowledge was viewed as derived from that, as knowledge that was limited with respect to method.

3. Another objection is that the postulate is immune to criticism because it is immediate and therefore unprovable. With his search for a sure foundation Tillich is dependent on classical foundationalism which requires undoubted starting points on which the structure of knowledge can be erected.

13 D-M Grube, *Unbegründbarkeit Gottes? Tillichs und Barths Erkenntnistheorien im Horizont der gegenwärtigen Philosophie*, Marburg: N.G. Elwert Verlag, 52f., 220f.

14 W. Stoker, *Can the God of the Philosophers and the God of Abraham be Reconciled? On God the Almighty*, in: G. Hummel, D. Lax (Eds.), *Being versus Word in Paul Tillich's Theology*, Berlin/New York: De Gruyter 1999, 206-224.

1.2 The Theological Circle: Theology on the Basis of a Faith Position

Apart from the postulate of the unconditional, theology also agrees with the other sciences in its rational character. It is rational semantically because of its clear use of concepts, logically because it does not admit any contradictions – although it does admit paradoxes – and methodologically because systematic theology is a coherent whole (ST I, 59-66). But, according to Tillich, theology also differs from other sciences in that, although it does work within the circle of the human sciences and philosophy of religion, its own circle is narrower. The criterion of the Christian message is added to this postulate of the unconditional, as he says in what follows:

“But the circle within which the theologian works is narrower than that of the philosopher of religion. He adds to the ‘mystical *a priori*’ the criterion of the Christian message.” (ST I, 12)

It is the task of the systematic theologian to explain the Christian message, in which the norm is ‘the New Being in Jesus as the Christ’ (ST I, 56). Of importance for us is what Tillich remarks about the church theologian entering the theological circle. Such a theologian has to stop speaking about himself “as a scientific theologian in the ordinary sense of ‘scientific’” (ST I, 13). Why? Because the theologian abandons the terrain of objective science that has no presuppositions, according to logical positivism, and enters the theological circle where presuppositions do exist. It is not Tillich but logical positivism that holds that science is “objective” and “without any presuppositions”. Theology is done on the basis of a faith position, for theology is, after all, the methodical interpretation of the content of the Christian faith and, as such, a function of the church (ST I, 18). That requires an existential decision by the theologian, a commitment to the content of the theological circle as his “ultimate concern” (ST I, 13).

Although Tillich could not call the theologian scientific in the usual sense of that time, that does not take away from the fact that, for him, theology is nevertheless still a public affair, as is also apparent from his correlation method. After all, he is searching for a point of contact with culture in that. He remarks here that, despite the concrete and special character of the Christian message, the theologian claims that that message has universal validity over against those who stand outside the theological circle. Here he has in mind theologians of other religions as well as secular culture. Apologetic theology should show that trends within all religions

and cultures all tend toward the Christian answer (ST I, 18). In this context he points to the *logos* doctrine: the universal *logos* has taken concrete personal form in Jesus. “Christian theology has received something which is absolutely concrete and absolutely universal at the same time” (ST I, 19). Tillich believes therefore that Christian theology is *the* theology:

“The Logos doctrine as the doctrine of the identity of the absolutely concrete with the absolute universal is [...] the only possible foundation of a Christian theology which claims to be *the* theology.” (ST I, 20)

We will see below how far this claim of Christian theology as *the* theology can be maintained in contemporary pluralist culture. I am asking that we look at the notion of verification that was central in the prevailing scientific climate at that time.

1.3 Theology and Verification

With respect to the requirement of verification Tillich does not choose the solution proposed by Paul van Buren and Richard Braithwaite who held that the Christian faith does not at all concern testing statements regarding transcendent entities.¹⁵ The Christian faith is about a moral attitude in life. The price to be paid here is too high for Tillich because such a view denies the claim of theology to knowledge and truth.

John Hick and William Alston are those who have come the furthest in meeting the requirement of empirical verification for theological statements. Alston investigates direct religious experiences and attempts to indicate an objective moment in them.¹⁶ Hick gives an eschatological verification of Christian faith statements. Christian faith statements can be tested at the end of history; then we will have a good overview of the whole and can see if the Christian truth claim is verified.¹⁷

According to Tillich, positivism is right in its claim that verification belongs to the nature of truth (ST I, 114). However, he opposes the re-

15 P. M. van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel*, London: SCM Press 1963, R. B. Braithwaite, *An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief*, in: B. Mitchell (Ed.), *The Philosophy of Religion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1971, 72-91.

16 W. P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press 1991.

17 J. Hick, *Theology and Verification*, in: B. Mitchell (Ed.), *The Philosophy of Religion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1971, 53-71.

duction of truth to empirical truth, for that does not do any justice to how truth should be understood. Truth is to be viewed in a different way from how logical positivism views it, i.e. as the “essence of things as well as the cognitive act in which their essence is grasped” (ST I, 113). According to Tillich, the experimental or empirical method of verification should not be made the exclusive pattern for all verification. He speaks about experiential verification and refers to life processes that are the object of biological, psychological, and sociological research. The verifying experiences of a non-experimental character are truer to life, though less exact and definite. He acknowledges the provisional nature of such a experiential verification, for the life process itself makes the test. These two methods of verification correspond to the two cognitive attitudes, the controlling and the receiving:

“Controlling knowledge is verified by the success of controlling actions [...] Receiving knowledge is verified by the creative union of two natures, that of knowing and that of the known. This test, of course, is neither repeatable, precise, nor final at any particular moment. The life-process itself makes the test.” (ST I, 114)¹⁸

The requirement of verification obtains also for theological statements. Their verification is their efficacy in the life processes of humankind. “They prove to be inexhaustible in meaning and creative in power” (ST I, 117). Mary Ann Stenger explains this as follows:

“Do past theological statements or symbols address the current human situation? What elements of truth from them should be preserved because they still hold truth for the present? What new expressions are needed to make those truths effective for the present? [...] If people experience the theology as connecting them with or expressing that which is ultimate, then they will verify it. Of course, such commitments and verification involve risk. The support of people does not necessarily validate truth.”¹⁹

In short, Tillich rejects experimental verification as the exclusive pattern for all verification. He acknowledges a parallel method of verification, i.e. experiential verification, for theology and sciences that explore life processes.

18 P. Tillich, *Participation and Knowledge*, MW I, 385 (GW IV, 111f).

19 M. A. Stenger, *Tillich’s Approach to Theology and Natural Sciences: Issues of Truth and Verification*, in: G. Hummel (Ed.), *Natural Theology versus Theology Nature? Tillich’s Thinking as Impetus for a Discourse among Theology, Philosophy and Natural Sciences*, Berlin 1994, 137.

1.4 Theology in Relation to the Other Sciences

I will describe Tillich's view of the relation between faith (theology) and science by means of the schema presented by Ian Barbour, who indicates four possible relations. With regard to the present discussion I will also give contemporary examples of positions concerning the relation between faith and science.²⁰ Ian Barbour sketches four possible positions regarding the relation between theology (faith) and science.²¹

The first position is that of conflict between faith and science. Tillich refers here to Galileo and Darwin. The consequence of the conflict is, he claims, a split between religion and secular culture (ST I, 144). An example of this position is also logical positivism with its claim that theological statements are meaningless. Contemporary examples can be found in the scientism of R. Dawkins and E.O. Wilson.²²

The second position is that of *independence*. Here it is stated that, for example, science is concerned with questions of fact and theology with questions of meaning. This position proposes a division of the joint property of faith and science between them. This can be found in Kant with respect to his distinction between physics and (physico-)theology, as well as in K. Barth and R. Bultmann.²³ Students of Wittgenstein now defend this position and consider science and theology to be two different language games.

The third position is that of *dialogue*; this position looks for methodical parallels between theology and science. An example of such a parallel is that theology and science concern a non-observable reality for which both search for a special language, such as models, metaphors, and analogies.

20 I. Barbour, "Science and Religion, Models and Relations", in: J. Wentzel van Huyssteen (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*, New York 2003, 760-766.

21 I. Barbour, *Science and Religion, Models and Relations*, in: J. Wentzel van Huyssteen (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*, New York: Macmillan Reference U.S.A., 2003, 760-766

22 R. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, London 2007; E.O. Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*, New York 1998.

23 I. Kant: *Critique of Judgment*, par. 79-85; Barth: A. L. Molendijk, *Aus dem Dunklen ins Helle: Wissenschaft und Theologie im Denken von Heinrich Scholz*, Amsterdam 1991; Bultmann: H. Gollwitzer, *Die Existenz Gottes im Bekenntnis des Glaubens*, München 1968, Hfdst 1; 2.4.

The fourth position, i.e. *integration*, looks for a (partial) integration of theology and science. A. Peacocke, the biochemist, provides a theology of nature, or people search for a synthesis such as that which can be found in Process philosophy.²⁴ The position of integration between faith and science can also be found with respect to the humanities. Tillich himself points out how, influenced by positivism in historical criticism, research was done into the so-called historical Jesus behind the gospels in order to provide a minimum of reliable facts about the man Jesus of Nazareth as a foundation for the Christian faith (ST II, 121). Tillich rejects this kind of historical apologetic as a wrong form of integration.

What is Tillich's position concerning the relation between faith and science? Tillich advocates the second position, but this does not, for him, exclude the third position, that of dialogue. The object of theology has to do with the ultimate concern, and science has to do with penultimate concerns. He draws the subsequent conclusion that knowledge that comes from revelation and ordinary knowledge differ with respect to nature and therefore do not conflict. "Knowledge of revelation cannot interfere with ordinary knowledge" (ST I, 144).²⁵ Not a single result of research in the sciences or the humanities can be directly productive or disastrous for theology.

"Theology has no right and no obligation to prejudice a physical or historical, sociological or psychological, inquiry. And no result of such an inquiry can be directly productive or disastrous for theology." (ST I, 21).

For the scientist, knowledge that comes from revelation does not add or subtract anything from his scientific description of nature. The same obtains for the historian and the psychologist. This entails that theological insights are not be viewed as scientific insights. Theology is concerned with existential truth, and that is different from truth in science.

It seems that, as far as theology is concerned, Tillich, like Peter Winch and N. Malcolm, advocates Wittgensteinian fideism, i.e. that the secular and religious believers live in different language games and thus in different worlds.²⁶ He writes:

24 A. R. Peacocke, *Paths from Science towards God*, Oxford 2001. A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, New York 1978.

25 P. Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (1957), MW V, 268-270 (GW VIII, 164-168).

26 P. Winch, *Understanding a Primitive Society*, *Rationality*, ed. by B.R. Wilson, Oxford: Blackwell 1985, 78-111; N. Malcolm, *The Groundlessness of Belief*, in: S.C. Brown (Ed.), *Reason and Belief*, Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press 1977, 143-157.

“The knowledge of revelation can be received only in the situation of revelation, and it can be communicated – in contrast to ordinary knowledge – only to those who participate in this situation. For those outside this situation the same words have a different sound.” (ST I, 143f.)

Tillich’s position with the postulate of the unconditional is not that of the type of two models of the world. He does share with these students of Wittgenstein the view of a division of joint property between faith and science but differs from them in that he views the Christian faith as cognitive. Theology has insights that are fruitful for science as well. Moreover, he is still dependent on the universal and formal view of rationality.

Tillich’s choice of a division of faith and science’s joint property between them can be advantageous in a scientific culture hostile to theology in that faith is thus protected against scientific critique. He holds, therefore, with respect to historical criticism that “historical research can neither give nor take away the foundation of the Christian faith” (ST II, 130).

For Tillich, the division of communal property does not exclude dialogue. As said he looks for a methodical parallel between theology and sciences with regard to experiential verification. It is also evident from his dialogue with the psychologist Carl Rogers.²⁷ Tillich recognizes that if people speak about the truth and knowledge that the Christian faith gives, then, one cannot escape making some kind of connection between what the Christian faith says about knowledge and truth and what the sciences say about truth. What theology says about creation is not unconnected with what science says about the origin and development of nature and the human being. The same obtains for the concept of humanity. The insights of psychology and theology can be fruitful for each other, if, as stated, the existentially coloured theology is not confused with scientific knowledge and truth. In passing, I will draw attention to the fact that the later Tillich also remained culture-theologian and has sought dialogue with the whole of culture (ST I, 16f.).

The relation between theology and historical criticism is problematic in Tillich. Here it seems to be a matter only of a division of communal property and not any kind of dialogue. Historical research into the Bible does not have any impact on the Bible as the book of believers. Tillich divides the two sharply and therefore has difficulty explaining the histori-

27 C. Rogers: *Dialogues* H. Kirschenbaum & V. L. Henderson, London: Constable 1990, 64-78. P. Tillich, *How has Science in the Last Century Changed Man’s View of Himself* (1965), MW II, 374-382 (GW III, 209-217).

cal anchoring of the Christian faith in history. The Christian faith cannot rest on an uncertain basis like history; faith can guarantee only itself.

1.5 Taking Stock

The task of theology consists, according to Tillich, in mediation. Such mediation is possible with respect to theology and the culture of science, in the following way.

1. Theology is a public, academic affair and concerns something that plays a role beyond the theological circle in the circle of philosophy of religion and human sciences as well. He makes that clear with the postulate of the unconditional. Theology makes this unconditional explicit in its theology. Moreover, theology agrees with other sciences in its rational character.

2. Tillich maintains the uniqueness of Christian theology in a scientific climate that is theologically unfriendly by arguing that theology should be done from a standpoint of faith, from the theological circle. He cannot call Christian theology scientific theology in the sense of what logical positivism understood by "scientific." He supplements the account of his Christian theology to the church by referring to the theological circle and the *logos* doctrine as explained by Christian theology.

3. As far as the task of mediation with respect to theology (faith) and science is concerned, on the one hand Tillich defends a division of the community property between theology (faith) and science. Thus faith is immune to scientific critique, particularly historical criticism. On the other, he is open to dialogue between theology (faith) and science.

4. Tillich shares the view of rationality found in classical foundationalism with the scientific climate of his time. For logical positivism, sense data cannot be doubted as a test for meaningful statements. Tillich considered the unconditional to be the undoubted foundation of the human sciences. For the Christian faith he sought an indisputable foundation in the self-grounding faith in Christ as the New Being. The consequence of this search is that the historical anchoring of the Christian faith in history fails.

2. Theology in the Climate of More Recent Philosophy of Science

By means of some of the issues mentioned above I will show how Tillich's view of theology in the current academic climate can be considered scientific.²⁸ But I will first provide a brief impression of the changed climate with respect to science.

2.1 The More Recent Philosophy of Science

Logical positivism had to give up its demand for empirical verification. This was weakened first into the principle of confirmation and later replaced by that of falsification with Karl Popper's critical rationalism.²⁹ Knowledge is no longer undoubted but fallible and open for correction.

Hanson's insight that perception is theory-laden is an important insight in more recent philosophy of science.³⁰ There is no objective perception; rather, perception always occurs within a theoretical framework that, like spectacles, colours reality in a certain way. The perceived facts are not objective and neutral but theory-laden. The logic-positivistic notion of an objective, neutral science is therefore bankrupt. Duhem and Quine produced new insights concerning testing. As a result, Popper's falsification method has also come under scrutiny.³¹ A crucial experiment in Popper's sense is impossible because one does not know precisely what part of one's theory or which assumptions are refuted by an observation or experiment. Thomas Kuhn developed a new view of science, *science as*

28 Wolfhart Pannenberg and Nancey Murphy have worked out a proposal for a scientific theology against the background of the more recent philosophy of science (W. Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press 1976. N. Murphy, *Theology in the Age Scientific Reasoning*, Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press 1990).

29 For a general overview see G. van den Brink, *Philosophy of Science for Theologians: An Introduction*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang 2009.

30 N.R. Hanson, *Patterns of Discovery: An Inquiry into the Conceptual Foundation of Science*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1972.

31 P. Duhem, *The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1991 (1906); W.V.O. Quine, *Two Dogmas of Empiricism*, W.V.O. Quine, *From a Logical Point of View*, Cambridge (Mass): Harvard University Press, 1953, 20-46.

paradigm, whereby it is acknowledged that such a paradigm is not neutral or objective but rather one perspective on reality.³²

The view of rationality also changed in connection with these developments. A *practice-oriented rationality* has emerged to take the place of classical foundationalism. This no longer concerns a universal and formal rationality with self-evident statements on which the structure of knowledge can be erected. Practice-oriented views of rationality claim that rationality coheres with a certain practice such as those of science, art, religion, and daily life. Such a practice has its own criteria for rationality. For scientific rationality, for example, social evidentialism would also be a good option. This holds that people should have reasons before accepting a belief as reasonable. Here reasons no longer consist in beliefs that can be directly justified but in the judgements of the community of experts. Foundationalism no longer plays any role. The only demand that can be made is that a belief be reasonably acceptable if one believes it on the basis of expert judgement. It is thus acknowledged that knowledge is fallible and open to refutation. The term “social” in social evidentialism points out that beliefs must be tested by a community of experts.³³

How would Tillich’s interest in theology as a public, academic affair look like in the climate sketched just above? Because we are concerned here with the scientific character of theology, I will not discuss his correlation method here. That, after all, has to do with the question of the point of contact.³⁴ In connection with the above I will point briefly to two matters. I will explain Tillich’s theology in the theological circle as a scientific theology viewed as a paradigm. Subsequently, I will show how such a scientific theology provides explanations. I will indicate a narrative explanation of Jesus as the Christ, whereby the possibility of refutation is acknowledged.

32 T. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1970 (1962).

33 H. I. Brown, *Rationality*, London & New York: Routledge 1990.

34 Tillich’s correlation method, with certain corrections, can, in my view, be used in a culture that has become pluralistic. See W. Stoker, *Is the Quest for Meaning the Quest for God? The Religious Ascription of Meaning in Relation to the Secular Ascription of Meaning*, Amsterdam & Atlanta 1996, 208-221. The use of a correlation method is disputed by L. Boeve, *God onderbreekt de geschiedenis: Theologie in tijden van ommekeer*, Kapellen: Pelckmans 2006, chapter 2.

2.2 Christian Theology as Paradigm

Tillich held that theology proceeds from a standpoint of faith (the theological circle) and demands a commitment. That can be explained in terms of Kuhn's view of science by looking at Christian theology as a paradigm.³⁵ A paradigm is the whole of convictions, assumptions, and norms with respect to scientific research by which a community of scientists works. Tillich's demand of a commitment by the theologian with the content of theology obtains for the scientist in general. The scientist has a commitment to the paradigm in which he works and acknowledges that experiences interact with a certain pregiven perspective. Science works, in other words, not on the basis of an objective starting point and a universal rationality but within a paradigm that has the structure of a hermeneutical circle. In that respect there is, formally speaking, no difference between theology and the other humanities.

Tillich's theology has a transcendental aspect, i.e. the postulate of the unconditional as a foundation for knowledge.³⁶ Aside from the objections to it, this does not square with the view of theology as a paradigm, for a paradigm does not have an undoubted starting point. Rationality is not neutral and objective, but a practice-oriented rationality. The theoretical suitability of the Christian faith can be shown through providing orientation concerning questions of life and referring to its existential suitability by giving a life orientation that makes life qualitatively good.

A scientific paradigm is fruitful if it gives explanations and (depending on the type of science) allows predictions to be made. That also obtains for Christian theology as a paradigm. It stands and falls with how convincing an interpretation can be given on the basis of the Christian faith of God, human beings, and the world. Tillich's claim to show that Christian theology is *the* theology is difficult to maintain in the current pluralistic culture. That obtains, of course, for the Christian theologian personally as well as for theologians of other religions. But in dialogue he or she is one among many. In addition to the Christian theological paradigm, there are also the paradigms of the other religions and that of secular worldviews such as humanism. Religious truth cannot be decided definitively before the eschaton. That is why a dialogue between faiths is necessary. Tillich

35 Van den Brink also argues for a theology viewed as a paradigm, although without using a correlation method, *Philosophy of Science*, op. cit. (note 29), 193-211.

36 The later Tillich maintains this, although his attention shifts to a existential approach.

himself provides fruitful insights regarding the relations between the Christian faith and the other world religions.³⁷

2.3 Narrative Explanation and Openness for Historical Criticism

Because Tillich wanted to protect the Christian faith from criticism by science, he could not properly explain how a *historical person* like Jesus of Nazareth is Christ, the New Being. Because of the changed view of science and rationality it is now recognized that explanations can also be narrative in nature and that stories can have their own form of rationality.

Tillich compares the gospel writer with an expressionist portrait painter who has painted the portrait of Christ as the New Being on the basis of Jesus of Nazareth. Here it is a matter of the transforming power of the portrait that the gospel writer painted of Jesus with his datable history. The portrait is, namely, a recreation of the person whose portrait the painter has made. We know this person precisely because of the portrait. There is only an *analogia imaginis*, an analogy between the portrait and the actual person who is portrayed.

“But it can be definitely asserted that through this picture the New Being has power to transform those who are transformed by it. This implies that there is an *analogia imaginis*, namely, an analogy between the picture and the actual personal life from which it has arisen.” (ST II, 132)

Tillich is right to speak of the surplus value of the portrait of Jesus Christ that the gospel writer composes from his sources. But it is not necessary to compare this to painting. Imaging not only has to do with the visual image of a portrait but also with the *semantic renewal that a story provides*. Instead of explaining the image of the gospel writer of Jesus as the Christ via painting, I would emphasize the semantic character of the image in the gospel story. Justice is thus done to the explanatory character of theology with the recognition of the historical character of the gospel.

The semantic model of the image is the metaphor and the narrative. Metaphors have the ability to say something in terms of something else, whereas narratives can say different things at the same time and can thus say something new and also give an explanation of apparent contradic-

37 W. Schüssler, E. Sturm, Paul Tillich: Leben-Werk-Wirkung, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 2007, 149-158; Religionstheorie und interreligiöser Dialog, Internationales Jahrbuch für die Tillichforschung, edit by C. Danz, W. Schüssler, E. Sturm, Berlin: Lit Verlag 5, 2009.

tions in the behaviour of someone or the coherence of events in someone's life. Imagination is the ability of a storyteller to give coherence to heterogenous elements in someone's life story so that an explanation can be given. A gospel writer like Mark gives a *narrative explanation* that this historical person Jesus of Nazareth is the living Son of God. Mark explains in a narrative way that this Jesus, mighty in word and work, is paradoxically the suffering Son of Man. To follow his gospel story is to follow a narrative reasoning whereby at the end of the story the reader has to declare if he found this narrative explanation of Jesus as the Son of Man convincing.³⁸

To emphasize with Tillich – albeit differently – the image character of the gospel story does not remove the question of historical criticism. Because it concerns the life and works of the historical person Jesus of Nazareth we can speak, in distinction from the gospel story as a “world of the text,” of a “world behind the text”. The evangelists have forged divergent historical sources into their gospel story. The question of the historical reliability of the gospels cannot be passed over because the issue here is that of a God who acts in the life of Jesus of Nazareth with his datable history. That is why, in my view, faith in Christ as the New Being should be open to possible historical falsification. In this respect the Christian faith is vulnerable to historical criticism. Does it then lack certainty, as Tillich held? Faith is a matter of ultimate concern and our commitment is complete. Can this commitment be complete here as well?

How can a total commitment be defended? Is it unreasonable to assent to something completely if we do not have undoubted arguments for it? According to the so-called rule of proportionality, the extent of assent to something depends on the kind of grounds that we have for something. In my view, this rule does not obtain in every situation. There are many things in life for which we have little evidence and yet for us they are certain. In daily life, in politics, and in religion people often have sure beliefs without having undoubted arguments for them. The degree of assent often exceeds the kind of reasons we have for such assent. That can be the case even in science. Whenever a researcher is pursuing a new theory or explanation for something, he must initially have a commitment to his

38 See W. Stoker, *Is Faith Rational? A Hermeneutical-Phenomenological Accounting for Faith*, Leuven: Peeters 2006, 144-160. In interpreting the Gospel, the story should have precedence above the symbol so to do justice to the “narrated time”. (W. Stoker, *Faith, Truth and History*, in: G. Hummel (Ed.), *Truth and History – A Dialogue with Paul Tillich*, Berlin: De Gruyter 1998, 119.

research that transcends the grounds for it. The problem is not that we do not have any undoubted arguments for the Christian faith. A problem does arise if complete assent is equated immediately with a dogmatic assent. That is an assent that does not go into the objections made against the belief and yet holds on to that belief, even though one knows that the belief is unfounded.

My conclusion is that, unlike the view of theology in the climate of science influenced by logical-positivism in Tillich's time, his view of theology from the theological circle, can be viewed in the current climate of science as scientific theology: theology as a paradigm. A practice-oriented rationality no longer makes the strong claim of undoubtability. The immunization of the Christian faith with respect to historical criticism is thus to be given up. Precisely in that way justice can be done to Tillich's interest in theology as a public affair, also in the scientific sense. In this connection it is important that Tillich is open to the dialogue with science. His theological view of nature can be made fruitful in such a dialogue with the sciences.³⁹

39 Natural Theology versus Theology Nature? Tillich's Thinking as Impetus for a Discourse among Theology, Philosophy and Natural Sciences, op. cit. (note 19), 1994.