Sin: Against Whom or against What?
SIN: AGAINST WHOM OR AGAINST WHAT

An assessment of Barth’s and Tillich’s perspectives on sin and sanctification in comparison to views of New Age authors
Preface and acknowledgements

The completion of this study, one that began already in the previous century, provides me with the pleasant opportunity to express my gratefulness and to give credit and thanks where it is due.

First of all and with gratitude beyond words, I call into memory my late parents. In their lives and very being, they were profound examples to me of genuine concern, of taking care and showing loyalty to their natural and spiritual roots. They taught me to have faith without being afraid, to endure and fight if necessary for a cause, and never to be indifferent.

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(ffe)

Contributors

to some part of the process of preparing, writing, and publishing this dissertation:

Haak Bastiaanse-Kuneman Stichting
Stichting H.O.C. Ruimzicht
Protestantsse Gemeente Slootdorp
Classis Alkmaar (Questor, mr. Nico Gomes)
Stichting Aanpakken

Brenda and Matthijs Kronemeijer-Heyink, Henry Jansen (linguistic improvements)
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Main Introduction

Presupposition
This study is about transforming views of sin. ‘Sin’ is basically a relational concept which describes the elements and conditions that determine the relationship between God and humankind, both collectively and individually. Thus, any change in the perception of God is inextricably related to a change in the understanding of sin.

1. The root of all questions
“At the root of all questions lies the world’s burden of sin”¹ is something my father used to say when faced with a complicated social-existential or spiritual problem for which he saw no immediate or easy solution. Sin was not something one needed to bow under, but it was certainly a reality that had to be acknowledged and confessed. This was clearly articulated in the prayers of public confession in church on Sundays. In these ecclesial ‘prayers of confession’ of the 1950s and later, guilt and sin were confessed in a personal setting vis-à-vis God as the mighty and merciful divine person. Sin was iniquity or transgression primarily against Him.² By the end of the century, however, this had completely changed.

The experimental service book (1998) of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PKN), contains seventeen ‘prayers of humbling approach (verrootmoediging)’, some of which do mention sin but express it mainly in general terms of collective guilt. Sin is confessed ‘before’ God as well as ‘before’ the church and each other,³ but there is no talk of sinning directly against God. In liturgy today, the former attention given to sin as iniquity performed by human actors contra Deum, has been largely replaced by looking at victims of suffering as a consequence of natural, moral or political structures of evil. A shift in emphasis from personal guilt towards tragic dominance has apparently taken place. Most often, the Kyrie litany concerning suffering in the world has replaced penitence for having personally sinned against God.⁴

This liturgical trend in the mainstream of Dutch Protestantism, reflecting a gradually changing sense of sin, can be mirrored in (and has been influenced by) three relevant developments that have taken place since the 1960s: one in the broad field of popular religion and spirituality, another in theological hamartiology, and last but not least, a development among practising Christians with respect to their experience of God.

The first development is the New Age movement: we will look at three exponents of this movement. Although the label ‘New Age’ is far from monolithic, it can serve to indicate a general trend within the spiritual climate of Western society since the 1960s, in particular the transformation from a strongly otherworldly or world-denying attitude...
to a more world-affirming or even strongly this-worldly assertiveness in the 1980s. Nurtured by roots in Western esoteric traditions, Eastern religions and the so-called third force of (humanistic) psychology, a growing awareness of “human potential” has come to the fore: an increasingly positive awareness of the human ‘self’. This trend is aptly caught by the subtitle of a book on the New Age movement characterising its spiritual core as “celebration of the self …”.\(^5\) Actually, this remarkable change in post-war human self-perception resulted for many in a self-consciousness of ‘being beyond sin’. Sin came to be considered as an outdated concept. Changes in the perception of sin did not only occur in popular New Age religion but also in the religious experience of concerned Christians (third development).

The second development concerns the theological reflection. Ever since the Enlightenment, the doctrine of original sin has been a stumbling block for anyone aspiring to self-sufficient human autonomy. Influenced by a changing anthropology that emerged in the studies of humanity and history, this doctrine also became a problem child for theology in the second half of the 20th century. In the wake of Vatican II, a wide range of critical analyses and attempts at reinterpretations were published, at first by Roman Catholic theologians\(^6\) and then also by Lutherans. At the same time, studies in defence of the doctrine emerged, criticizing the modern tendency to oppose anything that threatens human self-sufficiency.\(^7\) Still others saw the waning recognition of sin as the symptom of a bigger problem, identified as the weakening experience of divine forgiveness.\(^8\) Most of these responses – what else could be expected from theologians? – set out to maintain the doctrine and the concept of sin one way or the other.

The third development is a change in religious experience among many Christians, moving away from the traditional image of a personal God towards an understanding of God as an immanent ‘something’ or ‘principle’ or power. Remarkably, for many,\(^9\) Actually, this religious change can be seen as one string in the multifaceted development called *secularisation*. This term covers a vast and broad variety of perspectives and developments, all of which have been heavily debated in the second half of the previous century, such as privatisation of faith and the separation of politics and religion (scheidning Kerk en Staat), the assumed or denied waning of ‘spiritual awareness’ (transcendentieverlies), religious individualisation, and the decline of institutional religion (kerkverlating). These aspects form large fields of exploration and discussion that cannot be included. The present study is located on the field of ‘spiritual awareness’ of which the changes in perception, experience and acknowledgement of sin form a significant part. From the multiple and endlessly variated literature on the subject, I mention Berger’s classic, *The Sacred Canopy*; Kaufmann, *Religion und Modernität* (from a sociological perspective); Taylor, *A Secular Age* (a historical-philosophical account of the difficult relationship between religion and empirical science); Cox, *The Future of Faith* (on post-critical Christian faith). For an early discussion in the Netherlands on the wide use of ‘secularisation’, see Nijk, *Secularisatie*; for a brief discussion of the so-called ‘secularisation-thesis’ and its renewal, see Van Harskamp, *Nieuw-Religieuze Verlangen*, 18-34.


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this change does not imply that they are losing their religion or that they should stop using the word “God”. Most often, they may even continue engaging in prayer and keep telling their (grand)children Bible stories in which a personal God acts and provides. But when asked, they readily confess to no longer believing in a personal God. Obviously, such changes in the perception of God can hardly remain without consequences for the recognition of sin – at least not in the traditional sense of denying or harming the personal relation with a personal God. All three developments suggest that a sober and level-headed acknowledgment of sin is becoming rare.Religiously, spiritually as well as theologically, it seems that the doctrine of sin is in a crisis.

Most strongly, this came to the fore in the first development. The notion of ‘sin’ was not very popular in the New Age movement that had been rapidly growing since the mid 1970s. One of the three sources included in this study (M.Fox) is an exception to that rule, though not without severe criticism on the traditional concept of (original) sin. The other two discarded the idea of sin as an illusion or limiting concept and changed it to ignorance. These alternative notions and concepts reflect an element of a so-called change of paradigm that the New Age movement is often assumed to have brought. If true, this implies a profound hermeneutical problem that can be gauged when we ask questions like: What actually changes when unbelief is replaced by ignorance? Can enmity towards a personal God be meaningfully compared with ignoring or demoting your spiritual inner self? What happens when amor sui becomes thoughtlessness and structural anthropocentrism? Or when sin is changed to separation? To address this issue, two preliminary hermeneutical questions must be settled. The first regards the emic/etic distinction regarding the epistemic structure in which the observer and the observed meet; the second is a question about the (in)commensurability of different traditions or paradigms.

2. PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS: THE EMIC-ETIC DISTINCTION

Scientific honesty in describing and analysing alternative religious ideas and their framework requires, at the least, a serious attempt to evade a hidden normative bias in either an opponent or an apologist. An important tool to this end is the clear and conscious differentiation between emic and etic discourse.10 ‘Emic’ refers to the presentation of a belief, its ideas and experience, from the standpoint of a believer, whereas ‘etic’ is the systematic analysis and description of a belief in terms, concepts and interpretative schemes that are accepted as meaningful by scientific observers.11 The ideal of avoiding prejudices and the attainment of proper empirical objectivity does not mean that the researcher must always follow the emic account of a belief as given by its insiders or adherents. An etic observer must neither refute nor embark on emic meta-empirical truth claims. But s/he must acknowledge that emic claims are very real to their believers.12 One does not, for example, have to accept the reality of a higher spiritual entity called Seth to investigate the religious and/or metaphysical claims of those who do. What I intend is not sterile objectivity but

10 The distinction between emic and etic (derived from the terms “phonemic” and “phonetic”) was first used by the linguist Kenneth Pike in the 1950s and applied to cross-cultural and inter disciplinary studies in general, see Sutcliff, Children, 15f.
12 Platvoet, Comparing Religions, 17.
scientific fairness in studying and discussing the sources. The conscious and explicit
distinction between the emic self-understanding by believers and the etic interpretation
by the observer provides the most adequate guarantee for completing this aim.

**Commensurability**

Apart from the interaction between the researcher and the researched, the other
ejpistemic-hermeneutical question concerns the problem of (in)commensurability,
which has been highlighted and discussed by Hein van Dongen. This question
demands more attention. As the present study is to a certain extent a comparative and
interdisciplinary one, it is of vital importance that ideas and concepts taken from the
two traditions, Christianity and New Age, be commensurable. This presupposition,
however, is not plausible without further explanation. It can, for example, be opposed
by the thesis of the incommensurability of two different scientific paradigms.
Both terms are connected with the philosopher of science T.S. Kuhn (1922-1996) and his
widely influential book, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. The term ‘paradigm’
provided New Age mouthpiece Merilyn Ferguson with the concept that helped her
explain what was ‘new’ in New Age: a paradigm shift had taken place entailing
“personal and social transformation” on all levels of human existence.

Kuhn however had applied the idea of a paradigm shift in a much more restricted
way: as a scientific revolution within a science, a change in the “disciplinary matrix”,
such as the Copernican Revolution within scientific astronomy. According to
Kuhn, the new scientific tradition that emerges from a genuine paradigm shift is “not
only incompatible, but often actually incommensurable with that which has gone
before”. The same terms, concepts, and perceptions may recur but do so within a
 constellation of changed standards or measures (mensurae), which inevitably leads
to mutual incomprehension. All this has the sobering result that proponents of the
competing paradigms must not only “fail to make complete contact with each other’s
viewpoints” but “practice their trades in different worlds”. Aside from this rather
wide notion of “world”, Kuhn’s thesis of incommensurability covered two other, more
manageable aspects: namely, norms and concepts. For two different theories to be
commensurable, it is necessary that they have common measures to compare their
norms and concepts, i.e., that a common or “neutral observation language” is available

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14 Van Dongen, *opus citatus* (o.c.), 27. In his dissertation Van Dongen looks at the two main defenders
of the thesis, T.S. Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend. Both (re)introduced the thesis into the debate in 1962.
15 See: Kuhn, *Structure*.
16 Ferguson, *Aquarian Conspiracy*, 26. The book gives an extensive documentation of many forms and
levels of change in the 1970s and 1980s, whether personal, social, scientific, spiritual, educational,
ecological, political, as well as in the fields of healing, medicine and psychology.
17 Van Dongen, *Geen gemene maat*, 30; Kuhn had published a similar case study: *The Copernican Rev-
olution* (1957). In addition to the transition from the astronomy of Ptolemy’s *Mathēmattikē suntaksis*
in the 2nd century to the Copernican theory,Van Dongen also discusses other examples of paradigm
shifts such as the transition from Newtonian mechanics to Einstein’s theory of relativity, or the tran-
sition from classical physics to quantum mechanics. Beyond the field of physics, he also discusses the
transition in social sciences and history between 800 and 500 B.C. from the ancient anthropology of
Homer to the discovery of the human individual with his/her own conscious mind and the transition
from alchemy to modern chemistry, and the one from acupuncture to Western medicine.
18 Kuhn, *Structure*, 103, 148 and 150 respectively, as cited by Van Dongen, *o.c.*, 39 and 40.
for communication purposes. Since words and concepts, as well as their meanings and ways of applicability, are, however, often surreptitiously changed somewhere in the process of transformation from one theory to another, such a neutral, common language, according to Kuhn, does not exist.19

The thesis of incommensurability was also, and more or less independently, supported by Paul Feyerabend (1924-1994), a colleague of Kuhn’s at Berkeley around 1960. In those years, Feyerabend treated paradigms in a Wittgensteinian sense as different and mutually incomparable “language games” or “forms of life”.20 Like Kuhn, he denied the possibility of a “mythical observation language” and states in a slightly condescending way that when someone is faced with two incommensurable theories, the choice comes down to a matter of taste, aesthetic judgment or of one’s subjective wishes.21 Apparently, his position at the time was tantamount to the subjectivism and relativism that were to become the ingredients of post-modernism. But Feyerabend’s views underwent a steady transformation. Whereas Kuhn had applied the term ‘paradigm’ only within the context of natural or physical science, Feyerabend enlarged it to philosophical areas and other ‘forms of life’. Actually, since Kuhn’s classic work was published, the term paradigm has been eagerly adopted as well as adapted in New Age contexts and also in the methodologies of social, historical and human sciences.22 Starting in the 1980s, Feyerabend turned away from the idea of hermetically closed or strictly autonomous traditions and also from the accompanying relativism of this idea. He no longer argued that what one had to say was exclusively valid “within a certain system”. Such extreme relativism – Feyerabend now said – was only agreeable to those who hate change and enjoy living in “ideological prisons”. The problem of in-/commensurability between two different traditions was no longer regarded by him as an unmanageable fact but as a problem of communication.23 Lack of understanding between different cultures or between different scientific traditions was undeniably a recurring problem, but, instead of developing theories to make these problems absolute, one would be better off trying to solve them.24

Van Dongen views the problem of incommensurability largely from the point at which Feyerabend had ended, avoiding the Scylla of an absolute and perfectly lame incommensurability and the Charybdis of a utopian,25 base code language facilitating

19 Vgl. Kuhn, Structure, 201, 198; for the criticism on neutral observation language, see 126-129; 145-146; for these and other references, see Van Dongen, o.c., 41.
20 Feyerabend, Science, 67 as cited by Van Dongen, o.c., 59. Feyerabend is known primarily for his much revised Against Method. His slogan “Anything goes,” is frequently used and misused; it is not intended as methodological carelessness but instead reflects his conviction that different methods within different disciplines will inevitably lead to findings, although different ones. He objects to the dogmatic enforcement of one special method (Wider den Methodenzwang), see Van Dongen, o.c., 51.
21 Van Dongen, o.c., 61.
22 See Van Dongen, o.c., 30, especially notes 29 and 30; actually, the term ‘paradigm’ acquired a much larger or looser sense of meaning than in Kuhn’s use as ‘framework’, ‘sum of all the shared commitments of a scientific group’, ‘typical exemplar’ or prototype (schoolvoorbeeld); see Van Dongen, o.c., 29.
23 Feyerabend, Three Dialogues, 151, 152, cited by Van Dongen, o.c., 54. He uses the word “prisons” as an alternative for “unambiguous and unalterable systems”.
24 Three Dialogues, 155; cited and discussed by Van Dongen, o.c., 64.
25 The qualification ‘utopian’ is mine. My conviction that such a language is ‘utopian’ (or “mythical” as Feyerabend put it) is, admittedly, not scientifically based, but one can at the least argue that at the moment such a universal base code language is not yet available.
the community of all sciences. Thus, on the one hand, he agrees that all knowledge is paradigm-bound but states on the other that any paradigm is “finite”; further, different paradigms are not completely isolated but “interconnected”. There may be no “mythical observation language” but there is certainly a forum or “marketplace” where different paradigms do meet and interact. That is why Van Dongen can make the down-to-earth statement that actually “incommensurability belongs to humanity.” It is no more an unsolvable problem than something that can be completely disposed of. In this sense, Van Dongen suggests some clues that are relevant to the present study, aimed at comparing notions of sin and sanctification in Western Christianity with corresponding New Age perspectives.

First, incommensurability must be acknowledged. Denial or negation of it can take the form of refusing to even consider the mensurae (norms, notions, terms, concepts, perspectives, commitments, etc.) of a paradigm other than one’s own. Otherwise, an attempt might be made to force the other mensurae into simple identification with one’s own. Both attempts come down to a sort of spiritual solipsism that I will try to avoid.

Second, the diagnosis of the incommensurability of theories must not and need not be taken as a verdict of eternal separation or misunderstanding. The existence of the diagnosis itself already presupposes a common space, providing, at the least, the possibility of communication between the two. It suggests the possibility of complementing perspectives of the one theory with perspectives of the other, rather than leading to mutual dissolution or reduction.

Third, the solution Van Dongen has in mind is the adoption and exercise of a basic attitude, an open stance as regards the possible validity of measures other than those that are primarily one’s own. With these hermeneutical-epistemic considerations in mind, and in light of the developments indicated, I will now outline the content and objective of this study, the questions I seek to answer, as well as the methodological principles and route that will be followed.

### 3. Motivation and General Aim

My actual motivation to discuss the doctrine of sin is my strong suspicion that the loss of consciously acknowledging sin and dealing with it - apart from showing that the connection to a personal Deity is gone - may also reveal that the access to one’s own depth is lost. A sensible and thoughtful notion of sin is a helpful if not vital step in the process of human self-understanding. My initial and not yet specific aim was to present an in-depth discussion of the transforming view of sin from the second half of the 20th century until now by comparing the main relevant perspectives offered from the side of New Age (largely denying sin) with contemporary contributions by

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26 Van Dongen, o.c., 163; Van Dongen observes that even Kuhn had mentioned a “platform” or “market place” and that Feyerabend had strongly emphasised the interconnection between paradigms.

27 Van Dongen, o.c., 170: “Incommensurabiliteit hoort bij menszijn in meervoud.”

28 Van Dongen, o.c., 170.

29 Van Dongen, o.c., 171. Reference is made to Niels Bohr’s idea of “complementarity” in the field of quantum-physics regarding the particle/wave duality of energy. Measuring (or knowing) both the position (as particle) and its momentum (as wave) at the same time is physically impossible. Thus, there are two different procedures that complement each other (see also 117ff).

30 Van Dongen, o.c., 171.
Christian theologians about it. I started studying the history of the doctrine of sin in Western Christianity, as well as the main perspectives and beliefs within the New Age movement on the matter. In both areas, I was faced with the obvious problem of selection.

One of the first things that strikes one when examining both ‘paradigms’ is that, broadly speaking, in traditional Christian theology sin is understood in terms of ‘iniquity or evil against God’, whereas New Agers tend to avoid the notions of evil and sin: they rather speak of ‘ignorance of the divine’. Most often, they reject theism and evade or deny the notion of a personal God. It occurred to me that if ‘sin’ basically refers to a relational concept, then the shift from evil or sin to ignorance or limited consciousness on the part of the human is no more relevant than the transition from a person named God (God as someone) to what is basically a principle qualified as divine (God as something), which led me to the title of this study: *Sin against Whom or against What*.

Two other most relevant themes that are closely connected with the perspective on sin are two ideals that are highly treasured in the New Age worldview: first, a holistic cosmology with an integral, close and intimate connection between the human and the divine and second, a strong emphasis on a conscious and creative potential of the inner (divine, spiritual) human self. Based on these two central motives, most New Age sources display a twofold disapproving stance towards the Christian doctrine of sin. That is to say, they object to doctrines that on the one hand emphasise divine-human opposition or dualism and on the other deny or neglect a human individual’s (inner) potential to meet with the divine or actively achieve realisation of the self. With this in mind, the main questions are prompted.

4. Questions of research

Referring to the three points mentioned, the main questions of research with respect to both paradigms (New Age and Christian theology) are:

1. What is the perception of the divine-human relation? How is this relation seen?
2. What is entrusted to the human person? How is the assessment of the human potential? (i.e. the potential either to sin or to be (live, act, think, feel …) ‘in rapport with’ the divine)? And last but not least:
3. Is it necessary to see God or the divine as (a) person in order to speak of sin?

Clearly, these questions immediately draw additional issues behind them. For example, whether allocating personhood to God is seen as theologically crucial and indispensable for speaking of sin … or not: in both cases, offering at least some clarity about one’s definition of person(hood) is required. These additional problems will be further indicated below.

5. Final and specific aim

Based on the results that are found with the five sources, I will conduct a critical dialogue. With it, my aim is to arrive at my own assessment of and choice regarding their various views and parts of their views, in order to present a formulation of sin that is not dependent on believing in God as personal. In short, the objective of this study is to formulate a non-theistic concept of sin. The advantage of such a concept is that it can speak to non-theistic believers and even possibly to people who call themselves a-theists and yet find themselves to be religious.
6. METHODOLOGY AND ROUTE

In PART ONE both paradigms will be introduced. For the introduction of the Christian tradition (§ 1 Christian theology), I use the difference between God as person (theism) and God as principle (pan-en-theism) as tool of exposition for which I have selected two opposing voices in the history of Western Christianity. One approached God as a highly confidential person (Augustine), whereas the other saw God as (the spirit of the) universe (Schleiermacher). Both were major ‘soloists’ with regard to what is taught about the doctrine of sin. The former can stand as a model for mainstream Christianity, whereas the latter was repeatedly reprimanded for precisely the sort of unorthodox views, such as Spinozism and pan(-en-)theism, that are popular in the New Age movement. I present both of them as a beacon for orientation, each on their own terms. Augustine is also relevant because New Agers who criticize the Christian doctrine of sin most often have a version of more or less the Augustinian view of sin in mind. Therefore, I will choose a concept of sin inspired by the Augustinian model to represent the traditional doctrine and to serve as point of departure in all the explorations: Cornelius Plantinga Jr. states that “Sin is a culpable and personal affront to a personal God” (see below 1.1.2). On the other hand, the presentation of religion and holistic spirituality in the work of Schleiermacher is much more akin to New Age perspectives.

For a general introduction to the New Age movement, its main roots, history and leading ideas, I will base myself on secondary sources (§ 2 The New Age). The aim is to give an overview in order to localise the selected primary sources and account for their choice. Their selection is based on grounds of thematic relevance, representativeness of the movement, and mutual variation. Moreover, the acquaintance with the main historical roots of New Age in Western esotericism will be used to further elaborate the questions of research. This leads to an Inventory Table of four questions and four benchmarks that will be used to analyse the sources (2.1.2.c.ii; 2.1.3).

In PART TWO, the three selected primary sources of New Age religion will be explored. These are: § 3. Jane Roberts, § 4 A Course in Miracles and § 5 Matthew Fox. They will be investigated following a general scheme of three fields or elements that are relevant to the issue of sin. These elements are structured under the headings of Cosmology, Hamartiology (sin and evil) and Human Potential.

Under Cosmology, I describe the general worldview of the source under investigation, its (his, her) ontology or understanding of the nature of reality, and the way that the God-humankind-world relationship is envisioned. I will identify the way in which the nature of this relationship is envisioned.

Under Hamartiology, I will ask what is said and thought about sin and other forms of evil, either explicitly or implicitly. If the notion of sin is rejected, I will pursue what is regarded instead as impeding the full development of humanity, more specifically the human self, both in relationship to the divine as well as in relationship to other (created) beings.

The third field or element of attention is Human Potential which is, so to speak, the positive counterpart of sin, in particular, original sin. I will describe what is seen as the teleological perspective of the human individual – what kind of salvation, transformation, or self-realisation is aspired to. I will consider especially what is regarded as the individual person’s own contribution to achieving this telos.
The three main elements of the exploration will be preceded by a short biographical introduction and followed by an inventory of the results of the four questions and benchmarks (to be developed in 2.1.3). The scores will be entered in the Inventory Table. A first discussion of the scores and results will follow in the intermediate paragraph (§6. Taking stock (1)) before turning to the theologians (Part III).

Steered by the same questions, the agenda for PART THREE is a systematic investigation of contemporaneous theology as represented by two major voices: Karl Barth (§ 7) and Paul Tillich (§ 8). It can be debated whether the sample of these two is a sufficient representation of Western theology on sin in the (second half of the) previous century. My focus on a limited number is to some extent personal in the sense that I simply learn more from studying one or two authors thoroughly than I could gain from an overview of many which would inevitably remain more at a distance. This limitation, of course, is only acceptable when counterbalanced by other measures, such as influence, mutual polarity and complementarity, the latter also in their stance towards New Age perspectives. The theology of Barth can be expected to function as pièce de résistance, whereas Tillich’s mediating theology displays more affinity towards New Age perspectives. Both theological attitudes are essential in order to conduct a fruitful dialogue.

With Barth and Tillich these measures are fairly well met. Both died in the 1960s, the very same period that gave rise to the New Age movement. Their work was widely read and studied – Barth primarily in Europe and Tillich in the United States. Theologically they were counterparts, yet both have greatly influenced theological anthropology in their time. Their respective theologies are complementary in many respects and cover the large spectrum between the poles of theology and philosophy; church and culture, revelation and experience; kerygmatic and mediative; orthodox and eclectic; particular faith and general religion. Not unlike Augustine and Schleiermacher, Barth and Tillich were innovative theologians and can stand as beacons for orientation. It is also vital, of course, that both have written extensively and profoundly about sin and sanctification and about theological-anthropological questions concerning who we are as human being, in face of God. The selection of the parts of their oeuvre that are taken into consideration will be defended in the relevant sections.

Before moving on to the final and constructive part of my study, I will give a valuation of the findings (§9. Taking stock (2) & Some main concepts of personhood). Based on the Inventory Table, I will confront the twofold New Age criticism of Christian hamartiology with the perspectives offered by Barth and Tillich and indicate the extent to which the criticism holds true (9.1). But there is a circumstantiality that appears to be of greater importance, namely, that the differing perspectives on sin depend on (or at least go along with) diverging perspectives on both the assumed subject and object. The problem is that these divergences are practically incommensurable due to unclearly disagreeing views of ‘personhood’ concerning both the human person and the divine person or principle. In order to bring some clarification, if only to localise these differences, I will look for some relevant historical views on personhood (9.2). Moreover, the possibility of assessment and commensuration of the perspectives (both of New Age and Christian theology) and, on that basis, the possibility of coming to a new understanding of personhood and thereby of sin, is served even better by an
anthropology that covers as many of the diverging aspects offered by the sources as possible. Actually, my search for historical orientation led me, surprisingly, to the metaphysical anthropology of Max Scheler on which the latter part of this intermediate section will concentrate (9.3). The main perspectives offered by Scheler will be used in the final part.

The final **PART FOUR** is the constructive segment of my study, aiming at a reformulation of the concept of sin in non-theistic terms. After reviewing the sources with respect to the questions of research, I will probe to what extent and how Scheler’s anthropology can be applied to the relationship, the subject and the object of sin. To that aim, I will use the main ideas of his concept of personhood – in particular his near identification of the human person as or with spirit (§ 10. The three structural elements of sin).

On this basis, I will conclude my study by presenting my reformulation of sin in such a way that the notion of a personal Deity is not a precondition for accepting this notion of sin as relevant (§ 11. A Reformulation of Sin – Gains and Losses). The advantage of such a non-theistic concept is that it can also apply to non-theists – from self-declared atheists to Christians who profess to no longer believe in a personal God. The disadvantage or drawback of such concept is that traditional theists (firmly believing in a personal God) may not feel addressed by it. Moreover, this reluctance of more orthodox believers prompts the more general – and for some rhetorical – question: What is the importance, the interest of holding on to any notion of ‘sin’ whatsoever? I will answer both objections.

This entire procedure may suggest that here we once again have to do with a theology aimed at the ‘salvation’ of sin, as if my intention is to save the doctrine and awareness of sin. Frankly, there is some truth to this suggestion, namely, to the extent that the rejection of any possible reality of sin makes the acceptance of spirit or the relevance of God become less probable and less plausible as well. It is a bit like Popper’s demand of testability and verification: an hypothesis – and, after all, faith in God is also an hypothesis – that is meant to deal with truth should be falsifiable. According to this demand, divinity or God or S/spirit or whatever serious principle can only be real or true if it can be ‘denied’, which happens in one way or the other in sin. The (possible) reality of sin, therefore, is like the religious-theological equivalent of Popper’s method of verification through falsification: whether in regard to my own spiritual self or God, if I cannot sin, I cannot serve him either.
PART ONE: DEMARCATION AND ARRANGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

To be played satisfactorily, a sports game needs a marked place and distinct players. There are two clubs with their own playing grounds and a great many participants playing the same game, albeit in some ways differently. In the present study, the two ‘clubs’ or fields are Western Christianity and New Age Religion. For both of these, only a few historical exponents or paradigmatic players will enter the game of expressing and comparing views on human beings in relationship to the divine, situated within the totality of life and the world. In the following paragraphs I will give the tactics used for their selection and make the line-up for the ‘match’.

In §1. Christian Theology I will offer a close-up view of Western Christian thinking on sin, by drawing a *compositio oppositorum* of two significant figures. The one, Augustine, is a great representative of, and perhaps even the most outstanding pre-enlightenment representative of, mainstream Western Christianity. The other, Schleiermacher, is an archetypal counter-voice that was raised within the thoroughly changed epistemic horizon of the Enlightenment. I will sketch a picture of both according to the three connected elements outlined in the main Introduction (cosmology, hamartiology, human potential).

The purpose of §2. New Age Movement and New Age Religion is twofold. Firstly, I will provide some general orientation regarding the vast landscape that is evoked by the words New Age. On the basis of *etic* studies on New Age, I will sketch the wider circle of the broad New Age Movement and the relatively smaller circle of New Age Religion. Within the still elusive diversity of religious or spiritual practices and ideas I will focus on the ideas and perspectives related to the issue of sin or its New Age substitute. On the basis of this tentative overview I will introduce the three primary sources that are to represent New Age, as subject of my study. I will describe their position within the wide range of spirituality outlined before and account for their selection. The obvious logic to their inclusion is that they have contributed explicitly and to a considerable extent to ideas that concern the divine-human-world relationship (cosmology), human failure (hamartiology) and the perspective of human potential.

§ 1. Christian Theology

In the present paragraph I will describe two paradigmatic figures within Western Christianity that embody different ways of designing the divine-human relationship and the doctrine of sin. The first one, representing a fundamental voice within the main stream of Western Christianity, is Augustine (1.1). To a significant degree, his doctrine of (original) sin has entered the dogmatic body of Christian faith. As an integral part of the official teaching of the Church it became popular, as well as notorious. Most often when criticism is voiced against the idea of sin, it is actually directed against some version of the Augustinian perspective. In order to ponder this criticism adequately and with respect to reasons of commensurability, I will describe at some length the Augustinian position on the fixed issues of cosmology, hamartiology and human potential. Augustine actually represents the ‘*pièce de résistance*’ for most of the criticism we will encounter.

The second theological approach belongs to Schleiermacher (1.2) who may be regarded as the most far-sighted theologian of the last two centuries. In many respects,
Augustine and Schleiermacher were travelling along a similar road, but in opposite directions. Whereas the former largely moved away from Neo Platonic pan-en-theism towards Christian theism, the latter went the other way. I have included Schleiermacher to account for the parameters of the other end of the Christian theological landscape that have become visible since the Enlightenment. The question which lies at the back of my mind is to what extent Schleiermacher can be seen as a mirror image of his pre-Enlightenment and early Middle-Age predecessor.

Finally, I will collect some interim conclusions and elements for further attention (1.3).

1.1. AUGUSTINE (354-430)

One could easily expect that a strong emphasis on the seriousness and gravity of human sin corresponds to a clear separation and distance between the human and the divine, possibly to the extent of dualism. In this light, it is a remarkable feature of the theology of Augustine that he has emphatically embarked on the momentousness of sin as putting the human being in unbridgeable opposition to God but, simultaneously has also emphasized the close and intimately personal connection of the human soul (anima) with God. Though it is not my intention to give a full account of the many aspects of Augustinian theology, I will dwell on the two characteristics just mentioned as far as they are relevant to the understanding of sin as a concept of relation.

The development of Augustine’s doctrine of (original) sin is most often connected antagonistically with the views of the British monk Pelagius and the Italian nobleman Julian. However, long before his struggle against these two started, Augustine had already adopted the basics of his understanding of sin in a much less belligerent way. These views are largely present in his answer to Simplicianus and in his Confessions, finished both a decade and a half before Pelagius was targeted. Certainly, the Confessions are not specifically known for their dealing with sin as much as for their personal, autobiographic form and for the intimate divine-human nearness that is evoked in them. Both the feeling of inner nearness to God and that of sinful opposition against Him are markedly present, and it is likely that both feelings have a mutual influence. Therefore – apart from additional support based on secondary sources - I will draw especially on the Confessions in dealing with the way Augustine envisioned the divine-human relationship (1.1.1 Cosmology), its separation through sin (1.1.2 Hamartiology), and its restoration by grace (1.1.3 Human Potential) respectively.

1.1.1. Cosmology

Apart from being attracted to Christianity, Augustine, at the time of his legendary conversion in a Milanese garden, had also come under the spell of New Platonism as it was discussed and adopted in Christian circles as well as by his bishop Ambrose. Before he came to Milan, he had been a Hearer of a Manichean cell in Carthage and in Rome. I will first highlight the cosmological implications of both philosophies at some length as they furnish the background for understanding Augustine’s strongly

1 Augustine’s strong position on both sin as well as grace led to qualifications of either scorn or praise. He was scorned as the “father of the doctrine of original sin” by Julius Groß, Geschichte des Erbsündendogmas I, 375. On the other hand, he was called “doctor of grace” (doctor gratiae) by others, see Mühlenberg, “Dogma und Lehre im Abendland”, in: HDTG I, 446.

2 See the title of Lang, Augustinus, das Genie des Herzens; also Grün, Fünfzig Helfer in der Not, referring to the author of Confessiones as Genius of the heart.
personalized way of envisioning the divine-human relationship. Moreover, the Neo-
Platonic cosmology is largely congenial with the sort of *pan-en-theism* that is almost
omnipresent in New Age perspectives.

3 Manichaeism is known for its severe gnostic *dualism* between Light and Dark, Good and
Evil as two substantial but separate powers, and two Gods: the one of spirit, the other of matter.
Seen from the perspective of the divine-human relationship, however, Mani can also be seen as
supporting *monism* to the extent that he adopted a plane identification of the God or “Father” of
Light and the human soul.4 Despite his own former affinity, Augustine would later dismiss this
ontological equation as “*horrenda arrogantia*”.5 He could hardly refrain from doing so on the
basis of the Christian doctrine of creation, which is equally opposed to gnostic dualism as to a
crude divine-human monism, but it was Plotinian or New Platonism that eased the way.6

Plotinus held to the Platonic dualism between the changeable, transitory world of the senses
over against the unchanging reality of eternal ideas, but only partway as he also had a strong
feeling for the underlying unity of the multiple world of the senses. He attempted to connect it
with transcendent reality. Thus, as the basis (or one could equally say the top) of his cosmology
he adopted a primary, divine principle he called *The One*. Of this highest principle he stressed
its absolute transcendence. God or *The One* is beyond all thought and transcends all finite being
of which we have experience.7 On the other hand, Plotinus taught that *The One* poured itself
out, so to speak, into other and lower levels of being, which is implicitly suggestive of some
form of divine *immanence*. In order to account for the unity with (and among) the multiplicity
of finite existence, Plotinus adopted intermediary levels of being proceeding from *The One*
by emanation (*aporrein*).8 As metaphor for the process of emanation Plotinus suggested the
radiation of light, shining outwards from a center, gradually dimming and finally shading off
into the total darkness of “matter-in-itself”. As such, matter was regarded by him as the principle
of evil. This rings like gnostic dualism but strictly speaking, he did not locate the origin or cause
of evil in matter itself or as such, but in its being deprived of light. Evil according to Plotinus
is not a ‘positive’ principle but it is privation (*stérèsis, privatio*). It is not a possession but a
*lack*. So, notwithstanding a seeming element of dualism, Plotinus’s emphasis on the unity
and harmony of the cosmos was stronger. Actually, in Neo-Platonism the attempt is made of
combining the Platonic element of transcendence (of the eternal ideas) with the Stoic element
of immanence (of the all permeating *Logos*).9

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3 Passages like this are intended to give a lateral explanation or account of what is stated in the main text
or to give reasons for the course taken. They are in small print and without indentation. Indentation is
applied in case of crucial and/or more lengthy quotations.

4 Van Oort, “Manichaeism”, in: *DGWE* II, 761: “In the kingdom of light the Father of Greatness rules,
and this kingdom is in fact an extension of himself”.

5 Augustine, *Confessions* VIII,10,22 (translation H.Chadwick): “But [the Manichaeans] wish to be light
not in the Lord but in themselves because they hold that the nature of the soul is what God is (*putando
animae naturam hoc esse quod deus est*),”, judged by Augustine as *horrenda arrogantia*.

6 Plotinus’s Neo Platonism is of a harmonizing nature. For a balanced account of the many influences
combined in Neo-Platonism, see Copleston (S.J.), *History of philosophy*, I, 211v.

7 Copleston, o.c. I, 208, 209; see also: Benjamins, *Zachte soort van zijn*, 49.

8 The first emanation, still on the purely intelligible level, is that of *Nous* (which he considered as the
“intelligible kosmos” - *ho kosmos noètos*) comprising the multitude of ideas; secondly the World-Soul,
in two stages, as the connecting link towards the sensual world. Plotinus named the lower-stage-World-
soul “nature” (*physis*) which he considered the real soul of the phenomenal world. In it he posited
reflections of the ‘noetic’ ideas which he named after the Stoic “*logoi spermatikoi*”. The individual
human souls proceed from the World-Soul in which they pre-exist before uniting with a body, the latter
belonging to the sphere of the material world. Several transmigrations may occur, see: Copleston, o.c.
I, 211, 212. Bejamins (o.c., 51) makes clear that the “procession” does not mean temporal succession,
but ontological dependence.
Apart from the emanative procession from *The One* outwards, there is also a reverse movement of “turning inwards”. This particularly concerns the human soul which, through union with the body, is contaminated with matter and therefore in need of ascension: ethically in active life, intellectually through contemplation and ultimately through mystical union with *The One*. When Plotinus was dying a friend arrived just in time to hear his last words: “I was waiting for you, before that which is divine in me departs to unite itself with the Divine in the universe”. The divine is to be identified neither with the body nor with the soul though it has far greater affinity with the latter. The divine is, so to speak, the soul of the soul, or – as Augustine would put it - God is the soul’s life. Plotinus’s *One* and Augustine’s God are both transcending and, to some extent, indwelling the soul. Although the Neo Platonist cosmology helped Augustine in leaving Manicheaism and becoming a Christian, he did not adopt it without significant changes regarding both the divine-cosmic as the divine-human relationship. Although the latter concerns us primarily, it cannot be separated from the former.

As regards the divine-cosmic relationship, Peter Brown observes a “turn away from the cosmos” and from a God-filled universe on the part of Augustine. Whereas Plotinus derived great piety from the Platonic notion of the World Soul, which he took as “a majestic *anima mundi* that gave life … to the entire realm of nature”, Augustine only allowed the notion on the condition that “it should not be worshipped”. Thus, Augustine let the Neo-Platonic “majesty of the cosmos grow pale”. Keeping distance from the idea of procession (*emanation*) of all reality from *The One* and adopting the Christian doctrine of creation (*ex nihilo*) led to a certain duality or distance between God and created nature which had many implications (e.g., as regards Providence). To Plotinus divine providence was integrated within the well-ordered harmony of all parts that form the whole of the universe striving back to *The One*. Augustine, however, came to see providence in “the marvelous and perfectly ordered distribution of the ages”. Divine love, according to Augustine, is not immanently given with the entire ordered cosmos but appears in “that narrow thread of prophetic sayings” culminating “in the coming of the Christ”. Thus, the holistic ontological cosmology of the philosopher was replaced by a more historical and psychological theology of the bishop. Not only God came to be

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9 Copleston (*o.c.*I, 213; 211) acknowledged that the idea of emanation might suggest pantheism but also observed that, though Plotinus rejected the idea of free creation *ex nihilo*, he equally denied “a fully pantheistic self-canalisation of the Deity in individual creatures”. Copleston concluded that Plotinus tried to steer a middle course “between theistic creation on the one hand and a fully pantheistic or monistic theory on the other hand”.


11 Copleston, *a.w.*, 214f; in contemplation God and the human subject remain separated but in a moment of ecstatic union one will be “filled with the intelligible light, or rather grown one with that light in its purity, without burden or any heaviness, transfigured to godhead, nay, being in essence God …”, *The Enneades*, 6,9,9/10, as cited by Copleston, 215.

12 Copleston, *o.c.*I, 208.

13 Augustine, *Confessions*, 42 (III,vi,10): “But you are no body. Nor are you soul, which is the life of bodies. (…) But you are the life of souls, the life of lives. You live in dependence only on yourself, and you never change, life of my soul”.

14 Both transcendence and ontological affinity are affirmed: not unlike Plotinus, Augustine came to find “the unchangeable and authentic eternity of truth to transcend my mutable mind” (*Confessions*, 127 (VII,xvii,23). But he also confessed God as the aim of human kind: “our heart is restless until it rests in Him” (*Conf.*, 3 (I,i,1).


16 Brown, *o.c.*, 316; 317f.

17 Brown, *o.c.*, 503, observes that Augustine’s “preoccupation with the problems of the human person and his fascination with the working of the will represented a decisive change of emphasis” compared to his contemporaries. As “the inventor of our modern notion of will” Augustine “is held responsible for a decisive shift from the ontological to a psychological approach to religion and culture”. Brown refers to: Dihle, *Theory of the Will*, 123-144.
imagined as distinct from the cosmological whole but so were human beings. As observed by Gisbert Greshake, in the Augustinian-Christian perspective the human soul was taken out of its harmonious inclusion in the cosmic order and was placed “as person over against the personal God.” This brings us to the other relationship that is our main concern.

On the topic of the divine-human relationship, the Dutch scholar Paul van Geest discusses many points of affinity between Plotinus and Augustine. For both is God, as the transcendent one, unknowable and inexplicably beyond expression and comprehension but simultaneously, he is more near to me, and more akin, than I am to myself. The transcendent aspects suggest distance while the elements of nearness and kin tend to immanence or at least closeness. Though acknowledging both sides, Van Geest seems to be primarily concerned with the aspect of transcendence. Thus he observes with regard to the last chapters of *Confessiones* that they aim at a sort of *docta ignorantia* to enable converts to experience the divine mystery as genuinely unknowable. Augustine valued apophatic discourse which means stating ‘what God is not’, rather than saying who He is, because we are basically unknowing of his essence.

This is a remarkable observation since Augustine has never been famous for theological wavering. Instead, he is known for the assertive and definite character of his doctrinal achievements, especially in his battles against heretics like the Pelagians. Being aware of this, Van Geest argues that Augustine’s theological discourse – firm and resolute as it may be - is embedded in an underlying awareness that God is unknowable and beyond rational perception; hence the title of his book, which mirrors the tension between expressive boldness and inner modesty. The latter characteristic complies with divine transcience, the awareness of which suggests a (qualitative) distance. There is, however, especially in *Confessiones* a remarkable and omnipresent strain in Augustine’s way of dealing with divine nearness as well.

Nearness, though a spatial image like distance, has nothing to do with outer reality

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18 Greshake, *Gnade als konkrete Freiheit*, 238. To some extent, the book of Greshake is a rehabilitation of Pelagius, not of Pelagianism.

19 Van Geest, *Stellig maar onzeker*, 44. According to Van Geest, both were inspired by a yearning for the unknowable God and had the drive to initiate others into it. Augustine owes certain points to Plotinus (*93: schatplichtigheid aan Plotinus*).

20 See Van Geest, *o.c.*, 41, 44, 60, 67, 89, 90. For Augustine, God as the driving force behind the order of all things is deeply secret (*occultissimum*), Van Geest, 58.

21 Cf. *Confessions*, 43 (III.vi.11): “But you were more inward than my most inward part and higher than the highest element within me”. According to Plotinus at least “something” of The One must be present in the human soul, Van Geest, *o.c.*, 43, referring to Plotinus, *Enneaden* V, 5, 12; also I, 6, 7.

22 Van Geest, *o.c.*, 90. Van Geest (*o.c.*, 96) exemplifies his point referring to *Confessions* 13,11,12 on the almighty Trinity, the awareness of which is rationally incomprehensible.

23 Van Geest, *o.c.*, 44, 45.

24 Van Geest is not unaware of this seeming contradiction. He agrees that in the Pelagian controversy Augustine was much more positive in his knowledge, but for tactical reasons. As bishop he was aware of the fact that doctrinal modesty while combating heretics would only weaken his point (*o.c.*, 199). Therefore, Van Geest suggests that the measure of uncertainty Augustine allowed himself was interdependent upon the situation and the issue at stake: “De mate waarin Augustinus zijn twijfel en onzekerheid verwoordt, lijkt af te hangen van de mate waarin hij de eenheid van de kerk in gevaar acht” (*o.c.*, 222).

25 *Stellig maar onzeker* (title of his book). Van Geest emphasizes in his closing lines that acknowledging the increasing apophatic element of ‘not knowing God about whom we speak’ is vital for understanding Augustine’s approach of God who is “unknowable but near”, *o.c.*, 223.
or matter. The ‘distance’ suggested by the idea of divine transcendence implies an inevitable rejection of any bodily or sensual presentation of divine reality. On account of this, and in line with Plotinian Platonism, Augustine adopted God as the transcendent one: invisible and entirely beyond perception. Yet, as the dialogical form and genre of his Confessions clearly indicate, he did not present God as unapproachable. Both sides are also present in Plotinos: God is unknowable and wholly beyond human comprehension … but he is not un-addressable. A significant and remarkable point I want to highlight is that God, being explicitly non-anthropomorphic and inexplicably beyond human imagining or understanding, can nevertheless be met in private. Like we can accost someone in the street so can we knock on heaven’s door and speak with the highly transcendent one as confidently as with an intimate person. The point I want to make is, that what is most significant in Augustine’s Confessions is perhaps not so much its doctrinal content but its dialogical form. The extended form of conversing with the transcendent One as with a person of intimate trust contains practical-theological implications of which the significance is not easy to ponder.

Addressing the divine directly as a person, as in an I-Thou relationship, is at least as old as the narrative of Abraham trying to rescue Sodom or as the Psalms of ancient Israel. But my suggestion is that the form of the Confessions as a highly confidential and personal dialogue with the apparently personal God cannot but influence the theological themes that are discussed. This can best be illustrated with Augustine’s perspective on sin.

1.1.2. Hamartiology

The traditional doctrine of sin as developed by Augustine is well-known for two of its aspects. Firstly and mainly, it is known as the dogma of original sin. This implies the denial of free will and is tantamount to the profession of the disability of humans to respond adequately to the call of God (non posse non peccare). In order to live up to the imago dei they bear, humans need the indispensable help of divine grace (see 1.2.4 Human Potential). Secondly, the dogma is known, somewhat notoriously, for its understanding of original sin as hereditary sin, meaning that the original sin of the primordial couple in paradise is seen as being passed on to the entire human race through the sexual act of procreation. The supposed hereditary character of

26 Van Geest, o.c., 36: Origen (185-254) had already pronounced an incorporeal and even immaterial image of God, but only in the Augustinian era did Christians become aware of it.
27 Van Geest, o.c., 51, 60. At this point Augustine remained indebted to the Manichaeans, although he later resisted the caricature they had made of anthropomorphic imagining within popular Christianity.
28 See Van Geest, o.c., 41f. observing that Plotinos’s apophatic discourse on God or The One is counter-balanced through the distinction of intermediate emanative levels, suggesting that The One is to some extent knowable, thinkable and discussable (Van Geest, o.c., 42). Though The One is incommensurable with anything visible or experiential, humans may long for him because “something” of The One is present in the human soul (43).
29 The highly remarkable duality of both transcendent and immanence, of divine nearness and hiddenness with both Plotinos and Augustine has been extensively documented by Van Geest (footnote 19), but he barely takes notice of Augustine’s way of addressing the “aeterna veritas et vera caritas en cara aeternitas” as a person (Van Geest, o.c., 92). Instead he pays special attention to the fact that Augustine in describing God had a far greater valuation than Plotinos for sensual experience and sensation (see 100, 101).
sin has been criticized and reinterpreted by many theologians. Mostly, the implied element of the universality of sin is maintained while the instrumental function of procreation is discarded and replaced by other explanations.\textsuperscript{30} There is a third aspect of Augustine’s understanding of sin which has been less an object of debate as the two points previously mentioned. Sin or the acknowledgement of sin is understood as a personal-relational affair. This third characteristic is the focus of my attention. It is closely connected to the changes in cosmological and theological imagination discussed above.

Compared to the perspective of emanation with several intermediary levels of being, the idea of creation implies a stronger distinction between the divine and the cosmos, between the Creator and his creation. It harbors the suggestion of more distance. Simultaneously, it has a leaning towards personalization, which is implicit in the idea of God as the Creator. While Plotinus revered \textit{The One} as the highest transcendent principle, Augustine - not without biblical influence - came to worship God as a person, as a Thou. This led to a corresponding perspective on sin and on the divine-human interaction that came to be framed in strongly personal-relational terms. This is clearly visible in Augustine’s \textit{Confessions}.

The picture of sin that arises in the famous chapter on his conversion\textsuperscript{31} is that of his refusing to accept and serve the \textit{One} whom he was already perfectly and personally aware of as his true \textit{Deus meus}. “I used to frequent your Church (vi,13); I had discovered the good pearl. To buy it I had to sell all that I had; and I hesitated (i,2).” Before his conversion, Augustine by no means belonged to the “vain” in whom there is no knowledge of God (i,2). “My desire was not to be more certain of you but to be more stable in you (i,1).” But this desire was as ambiguous as the prayer he once uttered “for chastity and continence, but not yet” (vii,17). He knew that it was better “to render myself up to your love than to surrender to my own cupidity” (v,12), but he felt too weak and soft to make that decision. The state he was in, then, was inconstant (\textit{languidus}, i,2), feeling heavy with slumber (\textit{gravis torpor}) (v,12).

Though at every point you showed that what you were saying was true, yet I, convinced by that truth, had no answer to give you except merely slow and sleepy words. (v,12).

The picture is drawn of a recusant, of someone who, in a condition of lazy weakness, refuses to do what he knows he ought to do. He wants to leave the trivial vanities of lustful life, which, indignantly, he even regards as shameful. Still, he hesitates to really detach himself from his old “loves” and “to make the leap to where I was being called” (xi,26). He wants to … but partly, not wholeheartedly (ix,21; \textit{non ex toto}). The suggestion of unfaithfulness and promiscuity only adds to the atmosphere of a highly personal affair.\textsuperscript{32} The sinner is like an adulterous husband admitting his betrayal and

\textsuperscript{30} Original sin has been reframed as “being situated” in the historical-social dimension (Schoonenberg, “De mens in de zonde”); in political terms (Eichinger, \textit{Erbsündentheologie}); in societal-structural configuration (Knapp, M., \textit{Wahr ist nur, was nicht in diese Welt passt}); or as stage in the development of individual identity (Pannenberg, \textit{Anthropologie}).

\textsuperscript{31} References in the following text refer to Augustine, \textit{Confessions}, chapter VIII (translation by H. Chadwick).

\textsuperscript{32} Cf. recurring references to cupidity in \textit{Confessions} VIII: (v,12), chastity and continence; healing of the disease of lust “but not yet” (vii,17); the suggestion of filth or disgraceful things that would have to stop (xi,26).
expressing his will to return to his true wife and domicile but too weak to cut himself loose from licentious liaisons.

The personal-relational character of sin also appears in the way that Augustine adopted the Plotinian idea of evil as *privatio boni* and adapted it to his idea of sin as twisted *will*.

I inquired what wickedness (*iniquitas*) is; and I did not find a substance (*substantiam*) but a perversity of will (*voluntatis perversitatem*) twisted away from the highest substance (a summa substantia), you o God, towards inferior things, rejecting its own inner life (*proicientis intima sua*) and swelling with external matter.33

Apart from stating that sin has no more substance than evil, Augustine says firstly that sin is *perversion* and secondly that it is perversion of the *will*. In terms of Neo-Platonism, evil is perversion of the ‘turning inwards’ that is innate in all levels of being: the inner dynamic or longing back to *The One*, the transcendent origin of their procession. Thus, within the Neo Platonic framework, sin is evil to the extent that the chain or “order of being” is turned.34 As such, it may result from ignorance, limitedness or carelessness but it need not occur with personal and willful intent. Augustine, however, tied this “perversion” to the conscious dynamics of the *will* (*voluntas*). Thus, he turned a more or less natural tendency into the personal choice of an individual’s will.35 Correspondingly, as we have seen above, the supposed object of this tendency or will had become a divine ‘Thou’. In other words, Augustine took to addressing the “highest substance” as a personal “you o God”. Thus, he turned away from a non-personal concept of evil and sin as framed within a cosmological structure and replaced it with a *concept of relation between persons*. The human person and the personal God do now stand ‘face to face’ with each other but no longer embedded within the hierarchical harmony of the cosmos. Instead, they meet within a common history. Either as a lazy omission of doing good or as a deliberate act of foulness, sin has become part of the particular interaction between a human subject and the personal God.

Although over a distance of more than a millennium and a half, it seems but a small step from the image offered by Augustine to that of a Calvin Theological Seminary professor like Cornelius Plantinga (Jr.) explaining sin as “culpable shalom-breaking”.36 Inadvertently reminding one of Plotinus’ harmonious cosmos, Plantinga describes the biblical ideal-picture of *shalom* as

the webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight … more than mere peace of mind or a cease-fire between enemies … shalom means *universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight* – a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed … Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be.37

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33 *Confessions*, 126 (VII, xvi,22). With the concept of evil as *privatio boni*, he could distance himself from the Manichaean perspective on evil as an independent substance, cf. Conf. VII, xii,18. See also Müller, *Christliche Lehre von der Sünde* I, 394.

34 *HDTG* I, 417: “Deswegen ist das Böse zunächst eine Verkehrung der Seinsordnung insofern die Seele sich zum Seienden wendet, das geringer ist als sie selbst ….”.

35 *HDTG* I, 419: Ohne es als direkte Kritik am Platonismus zu vermerken, hat Augustin die Vorstellung vom Willen … dazwischen geschoben.

36 Plantinga, *Not the way it’s supposed to be*, 14.

37 Plantinga, o.c., 10.
Disturbing the intended shalom, the ordo of the way things ought to be is, not unlike Augustine’s perversity of will, the “breaking of covenant” with one’s creator and savior. Plantinga very strongly refers to a relation between two persons when defining sin as a

culpable and personal affront to a personal God.38

As much as this outcome can be traced back to Augustine, it must be utterly foreign to anyone with even a trifle of (Neo-)Platonic inkling. Such a person would think it rather preposterous for a mortal to consider him/herself to have the ability to inflict injury on the absolutely transcendent One. To Augustine, however, influenced through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the combination and even dialogical interaction within a human being of the utterly transcendent but personal God on the one hand and a human subject on the other, has nothing to do with human pride or arrogance. Instead, it is the epitome of divine love and grace, constituting intimate divine-human closeness.

1.1.3. HUMAN POTENTIAL

Augustine holds that, without the actual assistance of divine grace, humans do not have the effective potential to live in tune with the image of God that they bear. On the other hand, when healed through grace this capacity is restored to a level beyond fallibility. Thus it seems that Augustine can be equally accused of somber pessimism and of high-pitched optimism. The verdict depends on which discussion he was involved in, either with the Pelagians or with representatives of the monasteries in southern France and Africa, who since the seventeenth century came to be designated as Semi-Pelagians.39 In his own mind Augustine had formed his basic view already long before the battle against Pelagius started, in answer to questions put to his attention by Simplicianus, the successor of bishop Ambrose. I will deal briefly with the three discussions Augustine was involved in regarding his perspective on human potential in connection with divine grace.

Simplicianus had asked about the function of the given law and about the sequential order of the gift of faith and works. He also wondered why it was that God had said ‘I have hated Esau’.40 Led by these questions and on the basis of Paul’s letter to the Romans, Augustine came to see humankind as “utterly dependent on God, even for the first initiative of believing in Him”.41 Now Simplicianus was neither an enemy nor an opponent, and Augustine did not intend to induce his former friend and present colleague to utter passivity. But he did want to elucidate that all human activity that is truly godly originates in and is made possible through a divine gift of grace.42 A

38 Plantinga, o.c., 12, 13.
40 Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 146f. Augustine answered with *De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum* (396/7) mainly on the basis of Romans 7,14-25 and 9,10-29.
41 Brown, o.c., 148. Some thirty years later Augustine would comment on this period to the extent that, though trying hard to uphold the free will, he could not but let the grace of God have the upper hand, cf. *Retractiones* (426) II,27,3 cited in: *HDTG I*, 452f; also Brown, 147.
decade and a half later, the Pelagian controversy ignited which would become a lot less friendly.\footnote{The Pelagian controversy ignited after some controversial theses of Pelagius’ pupil Caelestius were condemned by the Synod of Carthago in 412. In the years that followed, Pelagius and his ideas became the central target of Augustine until his condemnation at the great African council at Carthage in 418. After that, the controversy continued through Julian of Eclanum, see Kelly, 361; Brown, 345; HDTG I, 450ff.}

Pelagius did not deny that the aid of grace is indispensable to living a godly life but he differed on the question regarding where grace must be located and what it subsequently was. Pelagius saw it primarily as the gift of forgiveness in baptism. Through the sacramental deliverance from former sin the convert is reestablished into his/her original and natural potential (\textit{imago dei}). From then on the new born Christian is capable of understanding and doing what is right. Of course, (s)he does so not without the ongoing assistance of divine help that Pelagius also calls grace. But this ‘grace’ is given as the biblical law and doctrine (\textit{thora}) and in the life of Jesus Christ (\textit{exemplum Christi}).\footnote{HDTG I, 458; Greshake, \textit{Gnade als konkrete Freiheit}, 75; 94, 99, 102, 104; 110; 113.} For Augustine this was not enough. What Pelagius calls grace is only law and doctrine that have no power to persuade.\footnote{HDTG I, 458: the law may appeal to us (\textit{anreizen}, lat. \textit{suadere}), but we must be overruled (\textit{überführen}, lat. \textit{persuadere}), referring to \textit{De gratia Christi et de peccato originali contra Pelagium et Coelestinum} (I,10,11).} We decide effectively what to do, not on the basis of intellect or knowledge but on the basis of love. No one, however, is able to decide or choose to love.\footnote{Brown, \textit{Augustine of Hippo}, 375, referring to \textit{De Spiritu et littera} (xxxiv,60).} Therefore, actual grace is needed as the infusion of the “love of God” in our hearts through the Holy Spirit.\footnote{Greshake, \textit{o.c.}, 218, observes that ever since \textit{De Moribus ecclesiae} (388/90) \textit{Rom}.5,5 is a recurring \textit{Leitmotiv} for Augustine: \textit{Caritas dei diffusa est in cordibus nostris per Spiritum Sanctum, qui datus est nobis}.} This is like saying, contra Pelagius, that we may perfectly know the imperative of the law, and intellectually even agree with it, but without God supplying us with ‘delight’ in it,\footnote{Greshake, \textit{o.c.}, 220, referring to \textit{De spiritu et littera} XXXII, 56.} any command will reach us only on the surface, like a letter that kills.\footnote{According to Brown, \textit{o.c.},148f., Augustine had studied the nature of human motivation before writing his \textit{Answer to Simplicianus} and came to the conclusion that one can mobilize one’s feeling into action only if one is “‘affected’ by an object of delight” (with reference to \textit{De diversis questionibus ad Simplicianum} I,2,13). It is, however, precisely this ‘taking delight’ in something (e.g. in serving God) “that escapes our powers of self-determination” as it “is dependent on the inspiration granted us by God” (Brown, 148). My ecclesial colleague, Th.Korteweg pointed out to me that Brown is not so much quoting but rather paraphrasing and interpreting Augustine on the point in question. In his answer to Simplicianus (I,2,13) the word \textit{dilectio/delectare} is not used. Only of those that are ‘called’ it is stated that “\textit{non omnes uno modo affecti sunt}”, which can possibly be combined with Brown’s thesis. The same is true with respect to I,2,21 where Augustine observes that \textit{cum ergo nos ea delectant quibus proficiamus ad Deum, inspiratur hoc et praebetur gratia Dei}.}
Clearly, the perspectives of Augustine and Pelagius on grace differ at various levels, firstly on the point of the location of grace in the salvation process - the starting point of its working, in other words. Secondly, there is a difference which is rooted in the psychology of motivation and inspiration. Grace, according to Augustine, is not so much working on one’s intellect but on one’s affection, the latter actually preceding the former and determining the resulting choice that is made. For Pelagius, in the course of a Christian life after baptism, grace is basically a general gift of true knowledge to be accepted or not on the basis of one’s intellect-based free will. To Augustine, however, grace is a personal gift of true love that must touch and heal the inner person in order to regain in itself the genuine potential to love. This means that, once again, the position of Augustine implies a turn towards the personal. Just as sin appeared as a personal affront against the personal God, so grace came to be seen by him as a personal gift from God to an individual human person. This personal aspect reaches its ultimate figure in the doctrine of predestination with regard to the divine; and on the human part in the so called donum perseverantiae. Both issues came to the fore in the discussion with the monks.

Predestination can be seen as one end of a scale of which the other end is: the formal idea of free will (liberum arbitrium) as the plane juxtaposition of doing either good or bad. Augustine had abandoned the latter after he had previously supported it. The real question, as he had experienced it in the period of his conversion, is how to get beyond the point of choosing as easily against God, as in his favor. Only the one “who is emancipated from sin and temptation” has genuine freedom (libertas) which actually comes very close to the notion of human potential. It is the potential or “freedom to act fully” to which the human individual must be healed. It requires the transformation through grace of the human will into genuine love for the case of God, not only at the beginning of faith - as Pelagius thought with baptism - but during the entire development and continuation of faith in a human life. It is a therapeutic process moved on through the structural initiative ‘from above’ in which Augustine will not allow any human contribution or cooperation.

The themes of freedom, the initiation of faith and its maintenance as seen by Augustine together reduce the matter of grace into a sheer doctrine of predestination.
When even the first stirrings of the human will are “prepared” by God and when, in his wisdom God has “decided to prepare only the wills of a few” – as Augustine had written57 – then the unavoidable question is: what active role is left to the human subject? Actually, this anxious and even indignant question was advanced from the side of the monasteries in Northern Africa and the South of France. On becoming a monk or a nun, converts chose for total obedience. But what does this mean if they “had not once been free to abandon their freedom”?58 The controversy with the monks gave Augustine the opportunity to deliver his final draft of the great gift of grace, which actually amounts to his specific rendering of human potential.

Against Pelagius the doctrine of predestination served to uphold the freedom of grace, which actually is the freedom of God, simultaneously fostering human modesty. Towards the monastics, however, Augustine emphasized the doctrine to their empowerment.59 Instead of undermining the potential of human freedom to genuinely serve God, predestination rather secures its continuation and makes our faith more effective.60 Predestination is God’s foreknowledge, though not of our future merits which are themselves the fruit of grace. But God knows in advance what He himself is going to do. Those who are elected are predestined not because they believe but in order that they believe.61 To this end they will receive the gift of perseverance, which not only heals them from the original sin that they contracted from Adam but also will restore and bring them into a far greater potential. Before the fall, Adam enjoyed the formal freedom of posse non peccare. He could refrain from sin or not. This dual freedom was lost when Adam (and with him all his descendants) fell into original sin (i.e., into the state of non posse non peccare.) This predicament of depravation, the loss of potential and freedom cannot be healed through only restoring formal freedom at baptism and teaching God’s law. A much stronger medicine and a much stronger freedom is required now. Instead of the original potential to sin or not to sin, those who are chosen will now receive genuine freedom in which (mortal) sin is no option anymore. This is the gift of perseverance upholding the Christian person in the state of non posse peccare.62 Both predestination and the donum perseverantiae show a personal God aiming personally at the elect. Both concepts underpin an unfailing potential, bestowed on some but not generally enjoyed by all.

1.2 Schleiermacher (1768-1834)

Notwithstanding the historical distance and a thoroughly altered scientific landscape on account of the Enlightenment, Augustine and Schleiermacher can...
be said to have moved on a similar road, albeit in opposite directions. Whereas Augustine moved from the learned and educated elite of his time towards the Church and its biblical message, Schleiermacher explored the opposite route: starting at the fundamentals of the church and trying to reach the cultivated of his time, the “cultured despisers” of the Christian Religion. The social and philosophic scenery through which he moved was that of highbrow Romanticism. Though inevitably influenced by the Enlightenment, the Romantic attitude runs also counter to it in resisting the exclusive strictness of rational-empirical thinking which had “made the God of the Enlightenment a captive of human categories of understanding”. Romanticism, Esotericism and German Idealism can be designated together as strains of what is called Counter-Enlightenment. Against the disenchanting drift of reason and research, Romanticists rediscovered imagination, embracing esoteric (Boehme) and Platonizing traditions. Their cosmo-theology showed a similar coincidence or duality of divine transcendence and immanence as we have met with Plotinos and Augustine.

Although Schleiermacher, at the end of the eighteenth century, was a member of the Romantic circle in Berlin, he was, as a clergyman, also a relative outsider. This induced him to take an intermediate position and made him a theologian of mediation avant la lettre. According to Berkhof, the Speeches on Religion were meant as an apology of the Christian Religion primarily meant to convince his Romantic friends. Unfortunately, the work was not only scarcely appreciated by his intended audience, but it was also dismissed by representatives of the orthodox mainstream. Schleiermacher’s superior, the court rector, reverend F.S.G. Sack disapproved of the work as a rendering of pantheistic Spinozism.

While accepting the Enlightenment trust in reason and Kant’s critical definition of its limitations regarding science (Wissenschaft), the monumental importance of Schleiermacher to the further development of theology is his understanding of

63 Schleiermacher: On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers; the subtitle of his main work Der Christliche Glaube is also clear about his intenention: nach den grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt.

64 McCalla, “Romanticism”, in: DGWE, 1000


66 See: McCalla, o.c., in: DGWE, 1000-1001: On the one hand, the Absolute of Schelling (not unlike Plotinus’ The One and Augustine’s God, fio) is “incommensurable with human knowledge”. According to Friedrich Schlegel (living together with Schleiermacher for some time) we can, by reason, attain only apophatic nowledge of God, only a “negative idea of the Infinite”. This illustrates that the Romantic notion of divinity is nurtured by “the Ungrund, the essential Non-being of Boehme which wills Being into existence … God as the ens manifestativum sui, the Life-principle that strives from a dark original cause toward its own realization and corporealization”. Clearly (and on the other hand), the divine is not pictured as transcendent and unknowable only, since nature and history are interpreted by Schelling as “the unfolding of the pre-existent divine nature, as both a theogony (divine self-revelation and self-actualization) and a soteriology (restoration of Creation to unity with God)”. Thence the conclusion that the Romantic cosmos can be identified with “the emanated, living, analogically-linked cosmos of the esoteric tradition” (1001).

67 Mildenberger, Geschichte der Theologie im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, 70. Mostly the term mediation theology (Vermittlungs Theologie) is applied to a generation of theologians after Schleiermacher, who were partly his pupils, like Friedrich Lücke.

68 Berkhof, 200 Jahre Theologie, 52. According to Berkhof the apologetic character was well understood by his romantic friends but most of them were not convinced. Schlegel considered the work much too definite (zu bestimmt) and Goethe, though pleased at first, dropped out when the tone got more specifically Christian. Only Novalis was enchanted and found the Speeches “enlightening” and “strongly inspiring”.

religion as a sovereign human faculty of observing, intuitive ‘feeling’ next to the faculties of rational ‘knowing’ and ethical ‘acting’\textsuperscript{70}. Enlightenment theology before Schleiermacher had remained theology. Although it resulted in a severe reduction of the extent of theological knowledge, as well as of the acknowledged reality of God, it was still primarily about God.\textsuperscript{71} Kant, then, had located the idea of God beyond the strict reach of logical reason and thus beyond the scope of scientific knowledge. In this line, theology tended to transform into a practical doctrine of human ethical behavior. Schleiermacher offered a third way, by focusing on what humans can experience from God or the universe. Thus, he described religion or faith (Glauben) as the attentively-noticing awareness or intuitive sense (Gefühl) of the universe, in all its aspects, as universal unity. He more or less identified this with the both perceiving and receiving experience of faith.\textsuperscript{72} Thus, for Schleiermacher, theology is not primarily about God but about the receptive activity of believing.\textsuperscript{73}

Under the three fixed headings (Cosmology, Hamartiology, Human Potential) I will briefly describe the relevant perspectives of Schleiermacher that concern the development we have met already with Augustine, especially regarding the ‘personality’ of God and the implications for the notion of sin. The inclusion of Schleiermacher is to show that the main voice of Augustine in Western Christianity is not without a significant counterpart.

1.2.1. Cosmology

Whereas Augustine rejected Plotinus’s veneration of the harmonious cosmos,

\textsuperscript{70} Actually Schleiermacher offered a kind of ‘division of the joint property’ (du.: boedelscheiding) between faith and science; witness his account to his friend Lücke namely “dass jedes Dogma, welches wirklich ein Element unseres christlichen Bewusstseins repräsentiert, auch so gesetzt werden kann, dass es uns unverwickelt lässt mit der Wissenschaft”, see “Zweites Sendschreiben an Herrn Dr. Lücke”, in: Schleiermacher-Auswahl, 149.

\textsuperscript{71} González, History of Christian Thought III, 306f. According to Copleston, History of philosophy, 5 (part I), 174, English Deists like John Toland (1670-1722) and Matthew Tindal (1656-1733) can be characterized as “rationalists who believed in God”, although they differed in what they still could accept by reason or not. They actually reduced Christianity to a sheer natural religion (173).

\textsuperscript{72} See On Religion, 22 (Über die Religion, 79/50 (the last figure refers to the original edition of 1799): Whereas metaphysics tries “to determine and explain the universe” and morals wants “to continue the universe’s development and perfect it” – the aim and essence of religion “is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling. It wishes to intuit the universe, wishes devoutly to overhear the universe’s own manifestations and actions, longs to be grasped and filled by the universe’s immediate influences in childlike passivity” (Ihr Wesen ist weder Denken noch Handeln, sondern Anschauung und Gefühl).

\textsuperscript{73} This means that for him the first priority of theology is not ‘talk about God’ (German: Theo-logie) but talk about human awareness and experience of ‘all that is’, the universe or God (German: Glaubenslehre). See Schleiermacher’s distinction of theological propositions in The Christian Faith, § 30 (main thesis): “All propositions … can be regarded either as (1) descriptions of human states, or as (2) conceptions of divine attributes and modes of action, or as (3) utterances regarding the constitution of the world”. In the explanation of this Leitsatz, in §30,2, Schleiermacher makes clear that the first type can “only be taken from the realm of inner experience, that therefore, in this form, nothing alien can creep into the system of Christian doctrine”. In contrast, the third type regarding the constitution of the world may be mixed with “natural science” and the second type, being conceptions of divine modes of action, “may be purely metaphysical”. The second and third type lie at least partly in the field of ordinary science and “belong to the objective consciousness and its conditions and are independent of the inner experience and the facts of the higher self-consciousness”. Therefore, there is no guarantee that they are “genuinely dogmatic”. They are permissible only to the extent that “they can be developed out of propositions of the first form”. This brings Schleiermacher to the following conclusion: “Hence we must declare the description of human states of mind to be the fundamental dogmatic form”, because only this first type consists of fully authentic and genuine “expressions of religious emotions”.

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devoting himself to the conversing interaction and worship of the personal God, devotees of the Romantic attitude moved the other way and Schleiermacher, at this point, was no exception. According to Schleiermacher, the level of one’s religion is interdependent upon one’s cosmology. Presupposing a tripartite scheme of ever higher worldviews – the universe as chaos, multiplicity, or highest unity respectively – he makes clear that only in the latter case the cosmos deserves to be called by its proper name ‘universe’ implying its manifestation “as totality, as unity in multiplicity, as system”. Even without explicitly theological notions this highest view or “sense of the universe” contains more religion than either the worship of fetish or of numerous gods, which are the regular modes of religion connected with the more primitive worldviews. Thus Spinoza, according to Schleiermacher, scores high on having religion.75

An intuitive sense of the universe and its holistic unity is thus a more decisive measure of our religiousness than whether or not we “have a God” as a part of our intuition. As Schleiermacher put it: having or not having a God depends on the direction of our imagination (Fantasie):

In religion the universe is intuited; it is posited as originally acting on us. Now if your imagination (Fantasie) clings to the consciousness of our freedom in such fashion that it cannot come to terms with what it construes as originally active other than in the form of a free being, then imagination will probably personify the spirit of the universe and you will have a God. If your imagination clings to understanding in such fashion that you always clearly see that freedom only has meaning in the particular and for the particular instance, then you will have a world and no God.76

The creative role that Schleiermacher attributes to imagination with respect to our religious grasp of the universe bears an analogy to the formative function that Kant had ascribed to pure reason and its categories concerning knowledge. Imagination (Fantasie) which is more or less the creative side of religious feeling, is valued by Schleiermacher as the “highest and most original element in us”. He attributes a constructive capacity to it, coming close to a form of creating your own reality when stating that “it is our imagination that creates the world for you”. He also observed that it is only on the basis of this self-imagined world that we can have a God.77 Thus, in religion, a God as the personification of the “spirit of the universe” is optional - a possible imaginative invention or symbolization - but not indispensable.78

74 On Religion, 52f (113/128: Sinn fürs Universum).
75 On Religion, 52 (113/128): “Should not the one who intuits [the universe] as one and all thus have more religion, even without the idea of God, than the most cultured polytheist? Should Spinoza not stand just as far above a pious Roman, as Lucretius does above one who serves idols? But that is the old inconsistency, that is the gloomy sign of a lack of cultivation, that they reject most vehemently those who stand on the same level as themselves, only at a different point on that level!”. Given the last sentence, Schleiermacher did already have some misgivings with regard to the ecclesiastic disapproval that would become his part.
76 On Religion, 53 (113/129).
77 On Religion, 53 (113/129): “You will know that it is our imagination that creates the world for you, and that you can have no God without the world”.
78 On Religion, 53 (113/130): “Among truly religious persons there have never been zealots, enthusiasts, or fanatics for the existence of God (das Dasein Gottes); with great equanimity they were aware of what one calls atheism alongside themselves, for there has always been something that seemed to them more irreligious than this".
So it seems, that in *On Religion* the notion God is presented as only a secondary one, but this is not what he intends. In the *Christian Faith* appearing more than two decades later, he will make clear that the word, God, designates the ultimate origin of religion and of Christian piety. God is the “*Whence* of our receptive and active existence”.79 This famous formulation of the original meaning of the word ‘God’ corresponds with his earlier exposition in *On Religion*:

To present all events in the world as the actions of a god is religion; it expresses its connection to an infinite totality; but while brooding over the existence of this god (das Sein dieses Gottes) before the world and outside the world may be good and necessary in metaphysics, in religion even that becomes only empty mythology, a further development of that which is only the means of portrayal as if it were the essential itself.80

The essential religious thing is the experience of an infinite totality: the feeling one has with the absolute undivided unity hidden within the universe and which can be experienced through all-that-works-upon-us. The unifying origin behind all these workings is theologically expressed and portrayed in the word God. Thus, Schleiermacher would finally define the experience of Christian piety as the feeling or “consciousness of being absolutely dependent”: i.e., within the stupendous whole of the universe. He adds that this feeling is the same thing as “being in relation to God”.81 But going beyond that point in speculating about the hypothetical existence of this God as a separate personal being to be stated apart from our individual intuition (Anschauung) and immediate perception (Wahrnehmung) is qualified by Schleiermacher as a “complete departure” from religion.82

Although my oscillation between the two main works may raise some questions, Schleiermacher himself always emphasized the essential homogeneity of the two, albeit with more than two or three83 decades between them. Thus, in the second edition of *The Christian Faith* (1830) the same close intertwinement of God and universe emerges e.g., in his exposition on the experience of divine conservation (or providence). The perspective on conservation (Erhaltung) is described as coinciding with the view that

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79 *Christian Faith*, §4,4 “As regards the identification of ‘absolute dependence’ with ‘relation to God’ in our proposition (see nt.80): this is to be understood in the sense that the *Whence* of our receptive and active existence as implied in this self-consciousness, is to be designated by the word ‘God’, and that this is for us the really original signification of that word” (... dass eben das in diesem Selbstbewusstsein mitgesetzte Woher unseres empfänglichen und selbsttätigen Daseins durch den Ausdruck Gott bezeichnet werden soll ...).

80 *On Religion*, 25f (82f/57f).

81 See *Christian Faith*, §4 (main thesis): “The common element in all howsoever diverse expressions of piety (Frömmigkeit), by which these are conjointly distinguished from all other feelings, or, in other words, the self-identical essence of piety is this: the consciousness of being absolutely dependent, or, which is the same thing, of being in relation with God”.

82 *On Religion*, 26 (83/58).

83 In his preface to the second edition (1830) of *The Christian Faith* Schleiermacher observes that, notwithstanding the many differences from the first edition (1921/22), “no leading proposition has been omitted, and none has had its specific content modified” (*The Christian Faith*, vii). The same holds true regarding the relationship between *On Religion* (1799) and the first edition of the *Christian Faith*. As R. Crouter (translator and editor) observes in his editorial introduction, *On Religion*, xlv: “Schleiermacher never renounced the youthful work. Rather he continually sought to relate his evolving ideas to his original understanding of religion”. Berkhof remarked that in the preface to the third edition of *On Religion* (1821) Schleiermacher states that his Speeches *On Religion* are further explained and grounded in his simultaneously appearing *Christian Faith*, see Berkhof, 200 Jahre Theologie, 54.
“all … things are conditioned and determined by the interdependence of Nature”. According to Schleiermacher, even the strictest dogmaticians have acknowledged that divine preservation, as the absolute dependence of all events and changes on God and natural causation, as the complete determination of all events by the universal nexus, are one and the same thing simply from different points of view.

The divine and the universe are neither separated from each other nor limited by one another. Nonetheless, having the same span does not necessarily mean that God and the universe are identified. This is what Schleiermacher again and again emphasized, countering the ever-smoldering accusation of pantheism or Spinozism but never to the full appeasement of his orthodox opponents. The ever-repeated allegation and never accepted justification raise the suspicion of a misunderstanding due to disparate spiritual ideals, as transcendence versus immanence (theism/en-theism). I will re-address this in Part Four (10.4.b.iii).

Regarding Schleiermacher’s cosmology and the religious feeling that is annex with it, we take for now the understanding of the pious experience of absolute dependence as being not just a holistic feeling in which only the world in its whole is regarded of which “we are a living part”. Instead, according to Schleiermacher, the religious experience can only be explained “as an awareness [of the existence*] of God …”. But the God that thus appears to one’s consciousness is not described by Schleiermacher as a personal Thou, as we have met with Augustine. Instead, the religious feeling of absolute dependence is “awareness of … God, as the absolute undivided unity”. The term ‘holism’ lies at hand.

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84 Christian Faith, §46 (main thesis).
85 Christian Faith, §46,2. Reference is made to Quenstedt describing the matter (of concursus Dei et universi) “ita ut idem effectus non a solo Deo nec a sola creatura, sed una eademque efficiencia totali simul a Deo et creatura producatur ...
86 See Hasler, Beherrschte Natur, 147, stating that with “Gleichumfänglichkeit keineswegs eine Identität von Gott und Natur überhaupt” is intended. See Die Christliche Glaube §51, main thesis, where Schleiermacher discusses the Absolute Causality (schlechthinnige Ursächlichkeit) to which the feeling of absolute dependency points back: this divine or Absolute Causality is, on the one hand, “distinguished from the content of the natural order and thus contrasted with it, and, on the other hand, equated with it in extent (dem Umfange nach ihr gleichgesetzt)”.
87 When similar criticism as regarding On Religion was uttered against his Christian Faith, he complained that it only concerned the introduction, the prolegomena and not on the very Glaubenslehre itself. And indeed, after the prolegomena (§§ 1-31) in the first paragraph of the first material part of his work (1830 edition, §32) Schleiermacher immediately tries to ward off what he calls a “non-religious explanation” of the sense of absolute dependence, namely “that it only means the dependence of finite particulars on the whole and on the system of all finite things, and that what is implied and made the center of reference is not God but the world. But we can only regard this explanation as a misunderstanding” (§32,2). Berkhof, 200 Jahre Theologie, 53 was not impressed by Schleiermacher’s earlier defense (or complaint) to his superior Sack who had disqualified On Religion as an apology of pantheism, a rendering of Spinoza’s philosophy: “Sie enttäuscht aber darin, dass er die Beschuldigungen mehr mit Entrüstung abweist, als dass er sie widerlegt”.
88 Christian Faith §32,2 (italics ffo). The word “existence” that I have placed between [ … *] is misleading. It is the too determined a translation of a typical expression (das Mitgesetzte) of Schleiermacher: Das schlechthinnige Abhängigkeitsgefühl also ist nicht als ein Mitgesetztesein der Welt zu erklären, sondern nur als ein Mitgesetztesein Gottes als der absoluten ungeteilten Einheit. In my view, “existence” suggests a mistaken sense of objectivity. My own proposal would be: ‘The feeling of absolute dependency is not fully explained as awareness of being in the world, but only as awareness of God as the absolute unity’, ‘Welt’ and ‘Gott/Einheit’ are so to speak “mitgesetzet” in our awareness or consciousness. Only when we have the feeling of absolute ‘oneness’ or ‘unity’ with the universe (of which we are a living part) the feeling is religious and is awareness of God.
1.2.2. HAMARTIOLOGY

In the present section I will envision the perspective Schleiermacher held on sin as it relates to the traditional concept we met above, which was “culpable and personal affront to a personal God”. The significant elements in this form are (1) the personalization of the divine and (2) the notion of personal guilt and responsibility on the human side. For the discussion of both elements I will start from Schleiermacher’s general description of the concepts of sin and grace. These concepts have bearing on both the weakening and/or the strengthening of the higher self- or God-consciousness that develops in connection with the regular self-consciousness in the subject-object sphere.89 Regarding the role of the human individual in this development he observes that

the distinctive feature of Christian piety lies in the fact that whatever alienation (Abwendung) from God there is in the phases of our experience, we are conscious of it as an action originating in ourselves, which we call Sin; but whatever fellowship (Gemeinschaft) with God there is, we are conscious of it as resting upon a communication (Mitteilung) from the Redeemer, which we call Grace.90

Regarding the idea of divine personhood (1), the formulation “alienation from God” could be interpreted as alienation from God as a personified deity. However, though Schleiermacher left it to one’s imagination (Phantasie) whether to personify the spirit of the universe or not, the idea of God as a person apparently did not have great priority for him.91 Therefore, the alienation we feel as sin is not necessarily personally and intentionally directed against a personalized God. Instead, as the lessening of God-consciousness, sin signifies the fading awareness of absolute dependency, the losing of touch with “God as the absolute undivided unity”. And this, in turn, is the same as losing fellowship with the ‘spirit of the universe’ or God as the great ’Whence’ of all this unity. The non-personal – or at least not necessarily personal - identity of God is confirmed by the observation that for Schleiermacher, it is not the predestining God who bestows grace into the human heart as it was with Augustine, but rather the Redeemer Jesus Christ. He is the communicator of fellowship with God, the subject or donor of grace, so to speak. Redemption (Erlösung) means the active

89 In Christian Faith, §5,1, Schleiermacher distinguishes three levels of (self-)consciousness: 1. a pre-conscious or "animal life", in which the subject-object distinction is still in a "state of unresolved confusion" and in which a developed spiritual life is not yet present as in early infancy; 2. the regular or "sensible self-consciousness", resting upon the differentiation of feeling and perception, resulting in the subject-object distinction; and 3. the higher self-consciousness or "feeling of absolute dependence in which the subject-object antithesis disappears and the subject unites and identifies itself with everything, which in the middle grade, was set over against it". The third or "higher self-consciousness" (§5.4 höheres Selbstbewusstsein) has many interchangeable names as "feeling of absolute dependency", 'being in relation with God', 'God-consciousness', 'christian piety' (Frömmigkeit), 'fellowship with God' (Gemeinschaft mit Gott) or just faith (Glauben). The common thing in all these terms is the awareness of "God as the absolute undivided unity" which in terms of On Religion is the awareness of the universe as universe, that is, as a whole.

90 Christian Faith, §63 (main thesis).

91 Above, note 75(On Religion, 53 (113/129); see also Schleiermacher’s discussion of the divine attributes. With reference to infinity, he observes that “nothing shall be ascribed to God which can be thought of only as limited” (Chr.Faith §56, 2). To the extent that personhood implies limitation, it is conceivable to re-frame this observation into an argument against the personality of God, although I do not know whether Schleiermacher himself has done so somewhere in his oeuvre.
sharing and dealing (*Mitteilung*) by him of His sinless “perfection and blessedness”.\(^{92}\)

In this way it is Jesus Christ who is the “real origin of unhindered evocation of the God-consciousness”.

The non-personal idea of God also appears in the way Schleiermacher treats the notion of forgiveness in connection with justification. He observes that some Confessions emphasize the forgiveness of sins as the great thing, in which “the whole state of blessedness” is given and of which justification (the transformation of one’s relation to God) is only a special element. He, however, prefers justification as the “larger conception”, including the double aspect of forgiveness and one’s being accepted as a child of God, both of which are seen by him as subsequent to one’s true faith in the Redeemer.\(^ {94}\) Obviously, Schleiermacher’s focus is not so much on *sin* as an outer ‘act’ or objective ‘thing’ in need of forgiveness; instead, his point of attention is the accompanying consciousness. This consciousness actually belongs to the situation before conversion and the entrance of faith, namely to the common situation of sinfulness before any positive fellowship with God was felt. In this pre-faith-situation the individual “has no other relation to God except - in view of His holiness and justice - a consciousness of being guilty and meriting punishment”. Of course, this consciousness will gradually cease when ‘living fellowship’ with the divine appears, but how? Schleiermacher observes that the “easiest answer” is that the longer and more we come under the influence of Christ, the sooner we will “forget sin because it no longer emerges”.\(^ {95}\) However, simply “forgetting of guilt” is not enough to form a genuine “consciousness of forgiveness” in which the element of a real “memory of sin” is essential. At this point two types of answers are possible.

If we remember our sins – in the Augustinian sense - as a personal affront against the personal God, then forgiveness and the grateful awareness of it can only proceed from a previous forgiving act by this personal God, in whatever way this act may be envisioned. But this is not the type of answer Schleiermacher gives. Instead, he takes recourse to the polarity of the old and the new ‘human being’ that we are in faith. As he observes,

one who has let himself be taken up into living fellowship with Christ is, in so far as he has been thus appropriated, a new man; and both are one and the same consciousness. Sin in the

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\(^{92}\) See *Christian Faith*, §106; also: §88 main thesis; In the elaboration (§88,2) Schleiermacher observes “that Jesus possessed a sinless perfection, and that there is a communication of this perfection in the fellowship founded by Him”. This implies, according to Schleiermacher, that the recognition too, namely the acceptance by his followers of this sinless perfection, is due to the inner dynamic of that perfection itself (*dass auch das Anerkennen jener Vollkommenheit ihr eignes Werk war*); and thus, that “the recognition of the sinless perfection in Jesus Christ, definitely constraining us to the new corporate life, must in the same way be still his work” (In the same way to us as it was to Jesus’ contemporaries, ffo]. I further note here, how remarkable close this perspective comes to the very similar perspective we will meet with Karl Barth (see below 7.3.2).

\(^{93}\) *Christian Faith*, §22.2.

\(^{94}\) *Christian Faith*, §109,1; also: the main thesis.

\(^{95}\) *Christian Faith*, §109,2; the quotation goes on: “and if sin does not come into consciousness, neither does the sense of guilt and of deserving punishment”. That this answer would be too easy is confirmed by the Dutch sociologist of religion Meerten ter Borg, observing that the disappearance of the religious consciousness of sin (due to the evaporation of traditional, theistic faith) does not entail the departure of consciousness of sin and guilt altogether. Remarkably, he relates this persistent consciousness to the idea of a unified world of coherence, reason and justice (63). Humans have this idea and need it for orientation. And when a significant law or rule of this ‘universe’ is broken, they feel guilty, Ter Borg, “Waar is het zondebesef gebleven?”, in: Nauta, e.a., *Over zonde en zonden*, 57-63, 63.
new man is no longer active; it is only the after-effect of the old man. The new man thus no longer takes sin to be his own; he indeed labors against it as something foreign to him. The consciousness of guilt is thus abolished.96

In place of the *meritum alienum* of Christ compensating for our sins through forensic imputation, as some Confessions profess, Schleiermacher’s solution is more like an *alienatio peccati*, according to which former sin – or its accompanying consciousness - is receding from the (new) person we become under the sway of Christ. When sin is tied to the absence of ‘feeling that God is near’, then indeed, as soon as the concerning feeling *enters* one’s consciousness and more and more comes to dominate the mind, sin obviously is bound to fade away. One gets the impression that sin, according to Schleiermacher, is like inflicting an injury without a victim or is like the awareness of enmity without an enemy which, if true, is a way of ontologizing consciousness not unfamiliar in New Age thinking (esp. §3 and §4). Anyhow, with respect to Schleiermacher, the origin or even the entire location of forgiveness is not so much with the assumed injured object as with the ‘sinner’. Owing to faith, as Schleiermacher observes, the “consciousness of sin becomes the consciousness of forgiveness of sin”.

The observation (§63) that sin as alienation from God is experienced as basically “originating in ourselves” points to the notion of guilt or, at the least, responsibility on the part of humans (2). As we have seen so far, sin is primarily tied to the absence or lessening of pious awareness. It appears as privation, as the lack of something. What does this imply concerning one’s personal accountability? In general, sin is described “partly as having its source in ourselves, partly as having its source outside our own being”.97 The external part is what is traditionally referred to as original sin. It is tantamount to what Schleiermacher calls the “advantage gained by the flesh” during a time when the God-consciousness had not yet emerged and developed in us.98 This pre-religious situation, be it within a personal life or within the broader communal life determined by stock, race, nation, etc., is not an actual situation of sin but instead contains “the germ of sin”.99 Actual sin, however, being resistant to the God-consciousness (or deliberate alienation from the fellowship with God as undivided unity) can only occur when the latter is awakened. And, once the higher consciousness is awakened as a real factor, and when it is also capable of growth, then “every moment in which it does not manifest itself as such … is an arrest upon the higher activity - … originating in the doer himself – and is veritable sin”.100

This implies that Schleiermacher’s idea of sin as basically privation or weakening of God-consciousness does not in the least rule out human responsibility even though

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96 *Christian Faith*, §109,2.
97 *Christian Faith*, § 69 main thesis.
98 *Christian Faith*, § 67,2 (*Vorsprung, welchen das Fleisch zu jener Zeit schon gewonnen hatte*); see also, § 67, main thesis.
99 *Christian Faith*, §67,1. Regarding the term “original sin” (*Erb-sünde*), he observes that the element original (*Erb*) “correctly expresses the connection of the later generations with the earlier, as well as with the process by which the race is preserved; but the word sin (-*Sünde*) is misleading”. Actually, original sin is not really sin, as it indicates “that inherent quality of the acting subject which is a part condition of all his actual sins and is anterior to all action on his part”, § 69-postscript.
100 *Christian Faith*, § 69,3
it is not a clear-cut or objective responsibility, as if it concerned the execution of visible, outer acts. Instead, accepting this responsibility requires attentive and deliberate intuition and feeling (Anschauung und Gefühl). Evading sin and fostering the religious consciousness is primarily connected with acknowledging, with letting be and letting develop within oneself the universal awareness of undivided unity and absolute dependency, which is the same as feeling oneself ever more in close relation or fellowship with God. As soon as some piety or God-consciousness is attained and we want to give it the upper hand, we also become aware of the permanent “antagonism of the flesh”, which is - more than just personal - a collective human phenomenon (71,3). When this is fully internalized, either the situation must seem hopeless or help must be received and allowed, or rather sought for, from beyond the collective human self-consciousness of that moment. Thus, the first awareness of sin which occurs together with the initial genesis of the God-consciousness, has often and aptly been linked with the “first sentiment of redemption”\(^{101}\). Apart from justification as a change of relation to God, redemption also involves sanctification regarded as a changed form of life. This leads us from our part in sin (as alienation from …) to our part in the development of grace (as fellowship with God). This issue largely covers the question of the human potential to which I will now turn.

1.2.3. Human Potential

“Absolute dependency” as the form of Christian piety could easily be mistaken as a trivialization of the human part in the relationship with God and as a negation of human potential. ‘Absolute inter-dependency’ might be appropriate to avoid that mistake.\(^{102}\) Schleiermacher had a high esteem of the conscious human self and its capacity for growth and development of the pious higher consciousness. He based this positive assumption partly on the connected doctrines of the original perfection of the world and human nature. These express the conviction that the world is constituted in such a way and human beings endowed with such faculty, that “the God-consciousness can realize itself”.\(^{103}\) He located its actualization, however, beyond the individual in the redeemer.\(^{104}\) Thus, he adopted a double agency towards the actual occurrence and growth of the higher consciousness in question: one working from outside and to some extent supernatural (1), the other natural and situated within creation and within the human person (2).

The external agency (1) constituting the Christian identity is Jesus of Nazareth. In Christianity everything is related to the redemption (Erlösung) accomplished by him and the only way to participate in the Christian community is “through faith

\(^{101}\) Christian Faith, § 71,3.

\(^{102}\) No one less than Hegel gave an offending misrepresentation of Schleiermacher’s absolute dependency by comparing it to the attitude of a dog: “… so wäre der Hund der beste Christ, denn er ... lebt vornahmlich in diesem Gefühl. Auch erlösungsgefühl hat der Hund, wenn seinem Hunger durch einen Knochen Befriedigung wird” (Vorrede zu Hinrichs Religionsphilosophie, 1922), cited by Berkhof, 61.

\(^{103}\) Christian Faith, §59 (main thesis): the doctrine of the original perfection of the world and § 60 (main thesis) on the doctrine of the original perfection of man. Original perfection is not meant by Schleiermacher to suggest a real existence of original righteousness or sinlessness supposed to be spoiled by the fall. Instead, he means that, so to speak, the infra-structure of both world and human being has always been and still is so designed as to make God-consciousness possible, see Christian Faith, §57,1.

\(^{104}\) See the quotation above on grace or fellowship with God which “we are conscious of ... as resting upon a communication (Mitteilung) from the Redeemer”, Christian Faith, §63 m.th.
in Jesus as the redeemer”. As such, he embodies “unhindered evocation of the God-consciousness”, which is effected by Him through “the communication of His sinless perfection”. To the extent that until this communication the human race was included in sinful corporate life, the God-consciousness that is introduced by him must have a “supernatural origin”. By this Schleiermacher means that Jesus - or what he offers - is not just a product of the old life but represents an innovation from beyond the natural and rational order-of-that-time. Still, such an innovation is not absolutely supernatural, nor is it to be considered as an irrational miracle but it is “simply the supernatural becoming natural”. For this is to happen, however, there must be a receiving side as well within the human person.

In this whole matter we posit, on the one side, an initial divine activity which is supernatural, but at the same time a vital human receptivity in virtue of which alone that supernatural can become a natural fact of history.

The “receptivity” concerns the agency or activity situated within the human person which is the second precondition for the occurrence of higher consciousness.

At all levels of piety, it seems vital to Schleiermacher to uphold at least a minimum of human contribution (2). The reason for this is that “faith can rest upon nothing except an impression received”. However, in order to be actually received - even when

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105 Respectively Christian Faith, §11 (m.th.) and §14 (m.th.).; §22,2; §88 m.th.
106 Respectively Christian Faith, §22,2; §88 m.th.
107 Christian Faith, §88,4; see also Hasler, Beherrschte Natur, 139, discussing Schleiermacher’s notion of miracle: “Es bezeichnet das über das bereits Verwirklichte hinausgehende …”.
108 According to Schleiermacher “we should abandon the idea of the absolute supernatural because no single instance of it can be known by us, and we are nowhere required to recognize it”, Christian Faith, § 47,3. This also counts for the revelation of God in Christ (§47,1). Hasler observes that the capacity to absorb the divine, as it was in Christ, is part of the original perfection of human nature. Thus the appearance of Christ is analogous to all really innovative starting- and turning-points in the history of the “sich stets tranzendierenden Natur von der Schöpfung bis zur Vollendung des Reiches Gottes” (Hasler, Beherrschte Natur, 138). The process is designated by Hasler as “Naturverderbung der Gnade” (125).
109 See Christian Faith, § 13: divine revelation – of which the appearance of the redeemer in history is the significant example – is “neither an absolutely supernatural nor an absolutely supra-rational thing”.
110 Christian Faith, § 88,4; see also: “Zweites Sendschreiben an Lücke” in: Schleiermacher-Auswahl, 174: “Wo nämlich übernatürliches bei mir vorkommt, da ist es immer ein erstes, es wird aber hernach ein natürliches als zweites. So ist die Schöpfung übernatürlich, aber sie wird hernach Naturzusammenhang ...”. This is Schleiermacher’s “scheme also for revelation, Christology, pneumatology, ecclesiology .... This ‘relative’ or ‘limited’ perspective on the supernatural resembles the presentation of transcendence in Ter Borg, Uitgewaaierde Eeuwigheid, 39ff., especially Ter Borg’s third type of transcendence (tertiaire transcendentie, 42ff), which occurs when not only an existent meaning but all existent systems or paradigms of meaning are transcended. It has been stated that beyond the already existing or current meaning there is only Nothingness, possibly even capitalized (42). But is it really nothing and empty? Ter Borg states that when someone nevertheless tries to imagine the (until then) unimaginable, then the existing symbolic universe is actually enlarged. Ter Borg pinpoints the paradoxical result as follows: “wat veelal het transcendentie wordt genoemd, is een poging om een voorstelling te maken van wat onvoorstelbaar is. Dit... heeft een paradoxale consequentie: wat gedacht wordt buiten alle menselijk symbolische universa te liggen, maakt er in feite deel van uit. Daarom zal ik in dat geval niet langer van het transcendentie spreken, maar van het bovenwereldlijke. Dat het bovenwereldelijke als iets transcendentes wordt voorgesteld, maar dit, juist door het feit dat het wordt voorgesteld, niet is, geeft het een hybride status. Het onvoorstelbare voorstelbaar gemaakt. Over het transcendentie valt niets te zeggen, maar we moeten vaststellen dat de meeste mensen daar geen genoegen mee nemen”. (44)
111 Christian Faith, § 88,4.
it concerns the very first communication of God-consciousness – such an impression must be “capable of being experienced”. And though all piety is resting primarily on an “extraneous” act (einer fremden Tat), it is equally certain to Schleiermacher that this ‘strange act’ must be appropriated which is “always represented as action, as laying hold of Christ (ein Ergreifen Christi)”. With respect to conversion (Bekehrung), it is remarkable to see that Schleiermacher, on the one hand, emphasizes that all activity of the receiving subject must be regarded as “non-cooperative”. Referring to John 15,16 he makes clear that the ignition of faith is entirely due to Jesus. On the other hand and at the same time, he is very keen on finding a middle stage which is

an activity in real relation to the work of Christ, and yet neither co-operation nor resistance (.) a passive condition, yet including that minimum of spontaneous activity which belong to every complete moment.

He finds his minimum of activity – though wrapped in the packing of a passive condition! - in the consent of will, tantamount to “surrender to the operation of Christ or giving rein to a lively susceptibility (lebendige Empfindlichkeit) thereto”. The result is that the latter state passes into “quickened spontaneous activity” (belebte Selbsttätigkeit). But Schleiermacher goes back a step further tracing the very point where life (Lebendigkeit) originally departs from passivity and then arrives at the

desire for fellowship with God, never entirely extinguished, though pushed back to the very frontiers of consciousness (an die Grenze der Bewusstlosigkeit zurückgedrängt) which is part of the original perfection of human nature.

In search for the very first and initial activity of the subject with respect to experiencing the work of Christ, Schleiermacher thus takes recourse to the traditional understanding of the *imago Dei* which goes back as far as Irenaeus (130-200). As the part of human beings that was unimpaired by the fall, the ‘image of God’ came to be understood as comprising the *appetitus* or desire for God as part of the core identity of humankind. According to Schleiermacher, it is the first “point of attachment” (Anknüpfungspunkt) for every operation of divine grace.

112 *Christian Faith* §88,3; This experience of (or: the impression of) the sinless perfection of Jesus entails for the individual simultaneously the “consciousness of sin” and the “removal of misery” which is tantamount to the appearance of God-consciousness (§88,3).

113 *Christian Faith* § 63,2.

114 *Christian Faith*, § 88,2.

115 *Christian Faith*, § 108,6 (page 494); the “consent of will” is required in order to let the sense faculties (physical organism) and the inner functions of consciousness (mental organism) co-operate if only to hear and see, to receive and perceive the Word and its influence, *Christian Faith* §108,6.

116 *Christian Faith* §108,6 (page 495)

117 The notion *imago Dei* or ‘original perfection of human nature’ goes back to Thomas Aquinas, the Scholastics, Augustine, all drawing on Irenaeus’s distinction between ‘image’ and ‘likeness’ in Gen.1,26 of which only the latter notion, seen as a supernatural endowment of original righteousness, was supposed to be lost through the fall, see Pannenberg, *Anthropologie*, 44v.; also Kelly, 171. Part of the ineradicable *imago Dei* is the intellectual nature of humankind. Central to this human nature is the will or *appetitus intellectualis* to transcend one self. Finally, this implies the desire or love for God, see Vos, Aquinas, Calvin & contemporary Protestant thought, 133f; also 140, citing Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* (Ia, 2ae. 3,8): “Complete happiness requires the mind to come through to the essence itself of the first cause. And so it will have its fulfillment by union with God as its object, for … in him alone our happiness lies”.

23
Considering his meticulous way of making distinctions (in Christian Faith), one gets the impression that Schleiermacher was anxious not to provoke orthodox criticism again: witness his taking pains to fence off the idea of synergism. On the other hand, he showed himself equally determined to uphold the human role and potential to contribute to even the very first stirrings of God-consciousness as in conversion. According to Schleiermacher, the idea of a total human “passivity” is utterly foreign to human nature, degrading humans to lifeless objects. Moreover, such passivity would be equally remote from a living God-consciousness as communicated by the Redeemer. Accordingly, and notwithstanding the unmistakable aesthetic leaning in his phenomenology of religion, he listed Christianity among the teleological types of religion in which active states of mind (including their subsequent activity) are predominant over passive ones. But he also took care not to overstress the element of freedom which is the general premise of the teleological type. In case we overemphasize and presuppose the “ascendency of spontaneous activity” on the human part, the implication would be, according to Schleiermacher, that all strengthening of God-consciousness is meritorious and all obstruction of it a matter of guilt. But this is only theoretically true because it is self-evident that

if both arrestment of the impulse (Hemmung des Triebes) to the God-consciousness and quickened development (beschleunigte Entwicklung) of it are to be equally the act of one and the same individual, and consequently opposites are to be explained by the same cause, then, in relation to the doer, the two must cease to be opposed.

The underlying issue is that of formal free will (liberum arbitrium), which is the logical basis for any exclusive emphasis on “spontaneous activity” on the human part.

118 Christian Faith §108, 6 (p. 495): This observation concerns the human activity in the process of conversion.

119 Christian Faith §108, 6: “Since the whole life of the Redeemer, because solely determined by the being of God in Him, is activity and not passivity, it is clear that in fellowship with His life no moment can be purely passive, because everything in it that proceeds from Him and becomes an impulse is necessarily activity” (p. 494).

120 See On Religion: “Praxis is an art, speculation is a science, religion is the sensibility and taste for the infinite” (23 (80; 52f)); “I entreat you to become familiar with this concept: intuition of the universe. It is the hinge of my whole speech; it is the highest and most universal formula of religion…” (24 (81; 55)). It is not always rightly understood that – according to Schleiermacher - what a human being perceives or ’feels’ is not something of his or her own fabrication: what one intuits or perceives is the operation of all things on you: “The universe exists in uninterrupted activity and reveals itself to us every moment. Every form that it brings forth, every being to which it gives separate existence according to the fullness of life, every occurrence that spills forth from its rich, ever-fruitful womb, is an action of the same upon us” (25 (82; 56)). Thus, in religion, the universe determines or ‘touches’ our aesthetic-perceiving faculty (leading to eine Bestimmtheit des Gefühls). This can also be found in Schleiermacher’s famous definition of Christian piety as “neither a Knowing nor a Doing, but a modification of Feeling, or of immediate self-consciousness” (Christian Faith § 3 main thesis).

121 Christian Faith § 63,1; see also § 9 and 11; actually, Schleiermacher has attached two flanking meanings to the qualification “teleological”. On the one hand, it signifies subordination of “the natural in human conditions to the moral” (§ 9 main thesis) and thus “a predominating reference to the moral task” (§ 9,1); on the other hand, teleological is connected with the central notion of redemption by Jesus of Nazareth, which implies generally speaking a goal-oriented “passage from an evil condition … into a better condition” and specifically the communication and enhancement of the higher self- or God-consciousness (§11 main thesis; §11,2)

122 Christian Faith §63,1: “… indem sie (sc. die teleologische Glaubensweisen) von dem Übergewicht der Selbsttätigkeit in dem Menschen ausgehen … .”

123 Christian Faith, § 63,1.
This idea of free will is dismantled here – or rather its reach diminished – through an argument \textit{ex eventu}. Were the individual person to be taken as the sufficient and decisive cause of his/her conscious doings, then opposite outcomes must cease to occur as they cannot be explained on the basis of one sole cause. The point Schleiermacher seems to suggest is that, on the basis of a full-blown free will, the world would be filled with either the holiest saints or the foulest evildoers.

The genesis of the former is certainly possible, witness the God-consciousness that was realized in the Redeemer. On the other hand, such a development of piety could only happen on “the assumption of the original perfection” of created human nature. The latter forms the indispensable precondition, on the basis of which “the God-consciousness could develop progressively from the first person to the purity and holiness which it manifests in the Redeemer\textsuperscript{124}. Thus, Schleiermacher combined a creation-theological and a Christological argument to support his understanding of sin as only a “derangement”\textsuperscript{125} of the human predicament and, simultaneously, to underpin his high esteem of human potential.

1.3 \textbf{Conclusions and elements for further attention}

Having explored the relevant issues with Augustine and Schleiermacher, I must confess that their respective expositions are less antithetic then I had expected beforehand. If one insists on making a controversy out of it, it will be like the one Augustine had with the semi-Pelagian monks, not his fight against Pelagius. What strongly connects both giants of Christianity is the existential element of vivid ‘nearness’ in their painting of the human-divine relationship, though I hasten to add that the way each of them framed and elaborated this element is precisely the heart of their difference, especially the name they gave to the revered object in which their piety came to rest. Whereas Schleiermacher through wide-minded imagination came to an inner experience of absolute dependency, feeling himself to be a living part within the \textit{divinely unified universe}, Augustine, through introspection and biblical study, came to meet with the \textit{personal God} he could no longer evade, who had found him and arrested him. Considering his own mental journey, Augustine found that he had every reason to be deeply suspicious of himself in relation to God. Schleiermacher, too, had his reservations, though not so much against his spiritual self as regarding the rational self of Enlightenment whose competence he denied with regard to matters of religion. Still, he remained a child of the Enlightenment in the sense that he was fully trustful of the natural human potential. He only distinguished between divergent faculties of this potential, namely between the power of reason to comprehend the subject-object reality of science, and the spiritual power of \textit{imaginative feeling} which he regarded as the specific religious capacity to find and receive God as universal unity. But I do not intend to make a full comparison between Augustine and Schleiermacher. For now, the only aspects that must be established within Augustinian thinking are those that are likely to be relevant with respect to the New Age criticism. In the introduction this criticism has been linked with two central motives or ideals within New Age religion, namely a close and intimate connection between the human and the divine, mostly

\textsuperscript{124} \textit{Christian Faith} § 68,3. Part of the original perfection of human nature is the capacity to take in and assimilate the divine as it was in the redeemer. The appearance of Christ is analogous to all turning points in the developing history of the “\textit{sich stets transzendierenden Natur} ...”, see Hasler,138.

\textsuperscript{125} \textit{Christian Faith} §68,3 (\textit{nur als Störung der Natur})
within the context of a holistic cosmology (1) and a high assessment of the inner human self with regard to its spiritual and creative potential (2).

In connection with the point of divine-human-cosmic holism (1) we have seen that, after rejecting the severe dualism of the Manicheans, Augustine moved toward the Neo-Platonic cosmology that contains both dualistic and monistic elements. As a Christian, he adopted the biblical idea of creation, which, like Neo-Platonism, is capable of combining elements of both distance and affinity, remote inequality as well as immediate nearness between the Creator and the created. Augustine highlighted both possibilities. On the one hand, he established great intimacy between the human inner self (anima) and the transcendent God – even on the verge of divine immanence (en-theism). On the other hand, he relentlessly analyzed the perversion of the human will: its inner motions of pride, self-love, concupiscence and the outer acts of evil that come out of it. Thus, he developed the doctrine of sin, firstly, as an original orientation, secondly, as intentional offence against the divine, resulting in unbridgeable separation. Meanwhile, the idea of being embedded in a holistic cosmos moved to the background. In some way, and I suppose unintentionally, Augustine did put the human person in the very center of religious attention (see Fox, § 5).

Moreover, Augustine, and mainstream Christianity following him, took two other steps. First, he fashioned the divine of the biblical symbolism into the premier person God and, secondly, he made God into the all-designing author of a total predestination of all human individuals implying a severe delimitation of the human potential (2) which is the non posse element of original sin. The first element, the personalization of God, implies that sin becomes a personal affair, an impious affront, not to a divine element inside, but directed against a highest person automatically placed at a distance: “I sinned against you, o God!” The second element stands in opposing relation to the belief in human potential. We will have to see in what way the selected New Age sources respond to both motives: whether they deny the possible reality of human sin or failure altogether? To what extent they see it in personal terms. For now, the movement to which they belong, must be introduced.
§ 2 The New Age

INTRODUCTION

Doing a Google search on 'New Age' results in the modest amount of 107.000.000 hits within a second. Apparently 'New Age' is considered to be a useful label in order to expose, discuss or trade a wide variety of 'things'. To these things belong goods and practices, traditions and consumables, ideas and products. Their purport can vary from spirituality to bodywork, from inner wisdom to outer prosperity. The journey can aim back into one’s pre-personal past or embark on exploring the common grail of humanity’s universal future. One could easily forget that only half a century ago the term 'New Age' was the somewhat idiosyncratic kernel of a 'catastrophic' millenarian belief shared by some small esoteric “seed-groups” in a Bailey-an theosophical sense. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, the notion would lose its apocalyptic tone and content. As ventured by Sutcliff, the term “New Age” became an increasingly multivalent signifier. By the 1980s and 1990s “New Age had metamorphosed into a label for a sensual and somatic idiom of contemporary popular religion containing a little bit of just about everything. …[a] shift from sharply-focused, apocalyptic emblem to diffuse humanistic idiom.

New age has come to designate an ever-broadening movement and activity, most of which can also be referred to as popular religion or spirituality. The choice of words to describe it largely depends on whether the phenomenon is approached from a primarily sociological-ethnographic point of view or from the perspective of the science of religions. Although the concept of a movement is wider than that of religion, there is very little in the New Age movement that has no religious or spiritual aspect whatsoever. Much phenomena within the movement can be characterized as New Age religion.

The movement, its popular spirituality, and its religious features have been described and discussed in many ways: e.g., from an emic point of view by insiders, through journalistic approach, or from a Christian theological starting point. From

1 On March, 14th, 2018 the first twelve entries alone offered a stunning diversity of items for body, mind or soul: practices (yoga, zen meditation, aura reading, chakra massage, tarot card reading); forms of art (new age imagery, painting, music); philosophical currents (esotericism, hermetism, achemy, gnosticism, freemasonry, feng shui), consumables and commodities (incense, Ayurvedic wholesome foods, minerals, crystals), therapies (reiki, self-healing, regression therapy, rebirthing). Thousands of entries follow these.
2 Sutcliff, Children of the New Age, 30.
3 Speaking about “New Age religion” is certainly not speaking about a religion. Nor does it imply that one can speak of ‘the New Age religion’. It simply means that much within the vast New Age movement has a religious or spiritual character, see for similar clarification: Hanegraaff, New Age Religion, 7, nt. 25.
4 Ferguson, Aquarian Conspiracy; Miller & Kenney, Fireball & The Lotus. Bloom, New Age Anthology; Spangler, Pilgrim of Aquarius.
5 The approach can be investigative and open-minded like that of Shaw, Spying in Guru Land; Schmidt, Holle Diamant, or critically-valuating (from an anthropological-psychological perspective): Caplan, Halfway up the mountain; or disapprovingly-skeptical like : Spaint, Strafbare Lichaam.
6 Again the approach can be openminded and aimed towards (critical) dialogue like Sudbrack, Neue Religiösität; Van den Hoogen & Jonker, (editors), Pastorale Uitdaging van New Age; Van der Kooi, Heil en Verlangen; Kranenborg, New Age Visies. Some approaches are overtly judgmental like Newport, New Age Movement and biblical Worldview, others are supportive of New Age elements within Christiani-
the explicitly etic standpoint of humanities, scholarly research has been done in the social science of religion and the study of New Religious Movements, in the comparative science of religion and the history of ideas, and from a more culture-psychological approach. Since the change of the millennium, studies have been published by some relative insiders. Together, these secondary works provide a sufficient introduction into the vast and multifaceted domain of the second discussion partner in the present study.

My own question of research is much more limited, concerning the three elements as indicated in the introduction, namely the view on the divine-human relationship – as part of the Cosmological worldview – and the closely related elements: Hamartiology and Human potential. Moreover, I will significantly condense the multitude and quantity of New Age ‘material’ by concentrating in detail on only three primary sources. Therefore, the aim of the present paragraph (§ 2. The New Age) is to introduce as much or as little of the New Age movement and its spiritual-religious aspects as is necessary to account for the selection of the three sources and to localize their position within the New Age context. This implies that the gravity point of my research of New Age lies in Part Two containing the exploration of the selected sources (§ 3 - § 5).

The first part of the present paragraph concerns the movement as seen from a distance, describing its origin and main stages of development, as well as the main historical sources of input (2.1 The New Age movement & New Age religion). In the second part, then, I will localize and introduce the primary sources that are to represent the New Age in the intended dialogue (2.2 Introduction of three original New Age sources).

2.1. The New Age movement and New Age religion

In this subparagraph, I will briefly sketch the actual appearance of the New Age movement in the previous century and its development as a movement into the present (2.1.1 Actual appearance in the 20th century and its development). Secondly, I will indicate the significant historical strains of ideas that have supplied this movement with its main content (2.1.2 Historical roots and input). It will appear that ideas from Western esoteric traditions have entered and influenced the New Age in particular. Moreover, the most essential ideas in the tradition of Western esotericism, as they were identified by some of its Christian-Protestant despisers already in the seventeenth century, are remarkably relevant to the aim of this study and to the question of recognition/non-recognition of sin. Therefore, while leaving aside the polemic intentions of these early Protestant critics, I will use their analysis as a tool for the exploration of the sources. In the third part of this subparagraph I will describe how (2.1.3 Methodological agenda for research).

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7 Melton, Clark, & Kelly, (eds), *New Age Encyclopedia*; Lewis & Melton, (eds), *Perspectives*; York, *Sociology of the New Age and Neo-pagan Movements*.
10 Sutcliffe, *Children of the New Age; Corrywright, Theoretical and empirical investigation*; Kemp, *New Age: a guide*. Especially Corrywright (o.c, 98) emphasizes the importance of “method(s) of involvement and practical engagement” which he deems indispensable “to uncover individuals’ religious experience and expression”.

28
2.1.1 ActuAl AppeArAnce In the twentIeth century And development

As an evocation of the hoped for coming of a new world, the notion of ‘New Age’ is at least as old as the late Judaic-apocalyptic literature. In the last centuries before the Christian Era, the distinction was made between the present and the coming age (Eōn).11 This ”age to come” entered the New Testament idiom as one of the designations of the Kingdom of God.12 The original apocalyptic heat was, so to speak, cooled down into the second plea of the Lord’s prayer.

Jumping over two millennia, the notion of New Age, as it came to the fore in the previous century, seems to have been (re-)introduced by Alice A. Bailey (1880-1949).13 Apart from the term New Age, much more of Bailey’s spiritual ideas and idioms have entered into and strongly colored the early New Age movement, as shown by Steven Sutcliffe.14 What he described as a loose variety of worldwide interactive millenarian groups, flourishing in the post-war period until the early 1970s,15 had before him been identified as the New Age sensu stricto by Wouter Hanegraaff in New Age religion and Western Culture (1996). Hanegraaff distinguished a relatively small and largely millenarian movement of early New Age from the broad and much more this-world-affirming movement that appeared in its wake (2.1.1.a The New Age: from a strict to a wide movement). What appeared was a wide and open movement, the New Age movement sensu lato (2.1.1.b). Based on this brief historical review, I will demarcate my Field of attention (2.1.1.c).

2.1.1.a. The New Age: from a strict to a wide movement

This New Age sensu stricto took shape in alternative cults and groups, initially focusing on the emblem New Age as a “future era”. But this initially pre-millenarian subculture gradually transformed into an “idealistic movement” in which participants were encouraged to transform their way of living “as if the New Age had already come”.16 Especially the American David Spangler, a first hour New Ager played a catalytic role. In the early 1970s he lived and worked in the pioneering New Age community Findhorn, near the northeast coast of Scotland.17 Spangler strongly promoted the transition from apocalyptic prophecies towards a post-millenarian stance of confident world-affirmation.18

11 See von Rad, Theologie des Alten Testaments II, 314, with reference to IV Esr.7,50: God did not create one Eōn but two.
12 See Mark 10: 30 (King James bible translating Eōn with “world”); see also Hebrews 6,4v, about “those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, … the good word of God and the powers of the world to come …” (italics mine). Remarkably, φωτισθεντας (φωτισμός /φωτίζω) is a technical term in Syrian-Egyptian as well as in Iranian mystery religions, in (Christian) gnosis and in the Corpus Hermeticum, see Kittel (ed), Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testaments (ThWNT) IX, 324ff.
13 Hanegraaff, New Age Religion, 95; for more references, see his note 6.
14 Sutcliffe, Children, 49-54.
15 Sutcliffe, Children, 55-103; Chapter 3: The “nameless ones” – small groups in a nuclear age; Chapter 4: “The end is nigh” – doomsday premonitions.
16 Hanegraaff, New Age religion, 94, 97, referring to David Spangler.
17 The New Age project in Findhorn proved vital and is still active today as a Spiritual Community, Learning Centre, Ecovillage, see: www.findhorn.org. The site mentions that the Findhorn Community is registered since 1972 as the Findhorn Foundation, offering experience-weeks, courses, training, conferences, pilgrimage to power spots, workshops. Findhorn annually attracted some ten to fourteen thousand visitors annually in the previous decade. For a description of its genesis, see: Sutcliffe, Children of the New Age, 2003.
18 See Spangler, Pilgrim in Aquarius, 66: Abandoning apocalyptic or millenarian thinking, he empha-
Before this transition took place, the New Age movement (*sensu stricto*) was primarily active in England, though not without outside contacts, e.g., with UFO cults in the USA or similar spiritual groups in New Zealand. Those engaged in these change-oriented groups were in particular influenced by Theosophy and Anthroposophy. They cherished the “New Age of Aquarius” as the main symbol of their “central vision of a new and transformed world”. In the course of the 1960s and early 1970s, however, the ‘eye’ of the movement shifted towards the USA. Increasing numbers of the post war generation, the so called baby-boomers, became attracted and were adding to the movement a wide variety of alternative ideas and deviant pursuits. The now rapidly growing ‘counter culture’ was a very diffuse phenomenon, described by Colin Campbell as a “societal cultural underground” for which he coined the term *cultic milieu* (1972). With this term he meant a multi-faceted network of unorthodox and deviant belief-systems, practices and their adherents and practitioners. All that actively inhabit the cultic milieu share a common “consciousness of deviant status” and an “ideology of seekership”, distancing themselves critically both from dominant official religion and dominant scientific orthodoxy. In retroaction, Hanegraaff recognized “the crucial importance” of the concept to illumine the historical development concerning New Age. According to him, Campbell’s concept and practically all of its features read as remarkably relevant to the developing New Age movement. Therefore, he made use of Campbell’s concept to identify the origin of the wider movement - or “New Age *sensu lato*” - that emerged in continuation of the New Age *sensu stricto*. Whereas Campbell ascribed a common awareness of deviancy to the cultic milieu, what happened in the course of the 1970s, according to Hanegraaff, was that the milieu gradually became conscious of itself “as constituting a more or less unified ‘movement’”. He concludes that the birth of the following New Age movement (as it became known in the 1980s and further)

is marked by the phenomenon that people on a wide scale began to recognize the existence of what Campbell calls the cultic milieu. As a result, they began to refer to this milieu as a “movement” and began to perceive themselves and others as participating in this movement. This development took place in the period after 1975.

For a fitting description of this process and its results, Hanegraaff refers to Marilyn sized that “…the New Age is here now ( ). It is a spiritual reality, a creative force within us now. Why wait for some event before giving expression to that force? Why not pretend the great apocalyptic change has happened and instead of waiting for it, begin thinking and acting as if the New Age were here now? … Why not do those things in the community … and see what happens? It will free up a lot of creative energy that otherwise is not being used while waiting for some prophecy to be fulfilled”.

Hanegraaff, 96 suggests to “regard the UFO-cult movement of the 1950s as a kind of *proto-New Age movement*”.

Sutcliffe, *Children*, 74f., describes many other examples of small spiritual “seed groups” elsewhere, e.g., the “Heralds of the New Age” in New Zealand, run by “a core of dedicated and hardworking women … to promote the coming ‘New Age’”.


Colin Campbell, o.c., 134f.


Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*, 16-17, 97

Ferguson’s *The Aquarian Conspiracy* (1980) actually describing developments in the second half of the 1970s. From then on, in the 1980s and later, New Age became the designation of an ever widening movement (*sensu lato*), attracting an astonishing variety of participators with many different and even opposing ideals.

### 2.1.1.1. **The New Age movement - sensu lato**

At least two changes regarding the ideal of a ‘new age’ may have stimulated the movement’s extension, both in numbers and in variety of ideas and practices. Firstly, the millenarian focus on a better (or even totally other) world of the early New Age *sensu stricto* shifted towards the spiritual concentration on attending the inner human self. This is aptly illustrated by Paul Heelas’ characterization of the movement as the “celebration of the self”.

Secondly, the counter-cultural aspect of deviancy which was omnipresent in the “cultic milieu”, was sided with attitudes that were rather mainstream enhancing, and much more affirming the values and products of existing culture, even the fruits of capitalism. In other words, the other-worldly attitude of world rejection within the early New Age was gradually replaced with a world-affirming stance, either of a weak or even a strong this-worldliness. According to Heelas,

at the former end of the spectrum, the emphasis is very much on avoiding the contaminating effects of life in the mainstream. Rejecting all that is offered by capitalistic modernity, the dawning of the New Age essentially has to do with experiencing the best of the inner world, that is the domain of spirituality. The emphasis is very much on detachment. In contrast, at the latter end of the spectrum importance is attached to becoming prosperous. Inner spirituality is here utilized as a means to the end of experiencing the best of the outer world, rather than being intrinsically valued. Downplaying, even ignoring the role played by detachment, the emphasis is now on empowerment and prosperity.

On both sides, participants engage in inner spirituality but for the “spiritually purist” the inner quest is valued in and of itself for the sake of “authentic spiritual transcendence or realization”. From this purist point of view the rest of the New Age and especially the prosperity wing seeking self-enhancement is depreciated as driven by “spiritual materialism”.

For similar reasons, renowned New Agers, like Fritjov

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27 Ibid.; Ferguson, *Aquarian Conspiracy* (1980), describes how the element of underground deviancy proudly came to the surface as the “new paradigm”. Ferguson reports the paradigm-change in her book as being discussed passionately and passim in conferences and programmes, in auditoria and on every university campus in the second half of the 1970s. According to her, a fundamental and structural shift was going on, which was at the basis of changes at all levels in politics, science, education and upbringing, medical care and so forth. Personal and social transformation being all in the air, Ferguson gently turned the ‘underground’ association with conspiracy into an overt and serendipitous “breathing together” in a new consciousness of love and benevolence (see *Aquarian Conspiracy*, 19). Later she suggested “New Consciousness” as a more adequate alternative to New Age.


30 Ibid., referring to Anthony, Ecker, & Wilber, *Spiritual Choices*, 40. Heelas illustrates the prosperity wing with the example of a Silva Mind Control seminar during which a group of junior managers is taught to “use the power of your mind to increase your sales” (Heelas, 32). The same spiritual mechanism is used, though in a different niche in the market, when participators in a *Soul Creativity* seminar of the Psychology of Vision variety learn that “once … connection upwards is established, it automatically turns into helping other people”, Corrywright, *Theoretical and empirical investigations*, 214f.
Capra, soon distanced themselves from the emblem New Age. Capra himself advocated for “deep ecology” since he felt that much going under the name ‘New Age’ in 1980 and further lacked any political dimension. Capra and other former supporters, therefore, left the movement or at least stopped using its name by 1985.

Applying the distinction suggested by Hanegraaff, we can summarize the appearance and development of the New Age movement as follows. Firstly, the New Age sensu stricto existed until the 1960s and early 1970s and was carried by small deviant groups of all sorts - inspired with theosophy and anthroposophy, UFO cults, (deep) ecology, anti-war activism. This early New Age was stamped with a millenarian spirituality which, for some time in the late 1960s, even had a pre-millenarian or catastrophic-apocalyptic character. The New Age was expected to imply a global impact with only some of us, being transformed enough, going on to survive the transition.

Secondly, when the apocalyptic turnover did not occur, the expectation of a New Age became an ever-widening movement of progressive (or post-) millenarian activity as advocated by David Spangler. The new world was no longer expected as coming from outside, neither globally nor at once, but gradually and from within the human self. It would occur primarily through personal and individual change which would lead from personal to societal change all the same. Growing numbers of divergent groups and individuals, drenched in the cultic milieu of common deviancy, became conscious of themselves as forming an innovative movement, the New Age sensu lato. One most important practice within this widening New Age movement became the quest for inner spirituality, most often aimed at transforming one’s inner self-awareness and mentality; and from there one’s social, and environmental attitudes. In the 1980s and 1990s the movement expanded, and the notion ‘New Age’ came to cover a phenomenal variety of more or less ‘spiritual things’ as a simple Google search can show.

For the sake of completeness, I add some words about the further history of the New Age movement until now. Since the closing years of the century, some scholars have suggested a third phase in the movement’s development. As extension of Hanegraaff’s distinction sensu stricto – sensu lato, Daren Kemp has suggested to speak of New Age sensu latiore. Some years earlier in Italy, Massimo Introvigne had suggested to speak of “Next Age”, which he described as no longer a “movimento religioso”, but as an “arcipelago” of more or less separated ‘isles’ or client-cults. The background of his suggestion was the observation that New Age,

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31 In the closing chapter (entitled “The passage to the Solar Age”) of his Turning Point (1982), 431-466, esp. 461f., Capra makes clear that the new ecological vision of reality must be distinguished from “shallow environmentalism” as deep ecology. This is an understanding of ecology which requires “a new philosophical and religious basis”. Genuine ecological awareness, according to Capra is “truly spiritual”, implying “an intuitive awareness of the oneness of all life”, a “consciousness in which the individual feels connected to the cosmos as a whole”.

32 See Capra’s observations in an interview with the Dutch journalist Maurits Schmidt, Holle Diamant, 13f; criticism against the non-political attitude within New Age was also uttered by neo-pagans, see York, Emerging Network, 123v.; for similar examples of emic self-criticism also: Sutcliffe, Children, 196.

33 For examples of apocalyptic expectations around Christmas Eve 1967 in Findhorn; or in New Zealand by the so-called Heralds of the New Age, see Sutcliffe, Children, 115f.

34 Kemp, New Age, 179.

35 Introvigne, “La crisi del New Age e la nascita di un nuovo fenomeno: il Next Age”. Introvigne has embroidered on the theme in subsequent articles as: “After the New Age: Is There a Next Age?”, in: Rothstein, New Age Religion and Globalization, 58-69. For the concept of client-cults and client-ser-
having lost its original millenarian utopianism, had been “degraded by commercialism and was in a state of deep crisis” as voiced by New Age pioneers Spangler and Thompson. According to Introvigne, this development also caused “growing uneasiness” among Italian New Agers, for whom New Age had always been closely connected with utopic visions and progressive millenarianism. Analysing the issue, Introvigne assumed a change of the underlying spiritual attitude “from the third to the first person”, from “sacralization of the Self” (New Age) to “sacralization of myself” (Next Age). When the more collective New Age utopia failed “private utopias restricted to personal life” came to replace it. Thus, the shift is described by Introvigne as a development of individualization and privatization.

It may be questioned whether much is added with these observations. Emic (and of course etic) uneasiness or even judgments about the general course or about certain aspects of New Age are as old as the movement itself. As Hanegraaff observed in the mid-1990s, there is little reason to expect New Age adherents to “prove invulnerable to … the ethos of commerce which is dominating western society”. On the one hand, it may well be that the counter-cultural drive of deviancy, so central to the cultic milieu and the appearing movement in the late 1970s, is no longer connected with the emblem New Age today. On the other hand, since the Millennium change there have been most virulent demonstrations of counter-cultural criticism, exhibiting militant deviancy from mainstream developments. These present-century counter movements carry new names like Anti-Globalist, the Occupy movement, or more recently the movement of les gilets jaunes in France. With respect to the Anti-globalist activism two decades ago, it is remarkable that some scholars discussed the bewildering variety of its participators and parties, in connection with, again, Campbell’s notion of the cultic milieu.

2.1.1.c. FIELD OF ATTENTION

My general concern in the present study is with the New Age movement sensu lato, appearing in the second half of the 1970s and flourishing in the 1980s and further. This movement, and principally its religious substance, form the general background of the three primary sources that will be addressed in particular. Whereas the original and common denominator of the movement at large was the critical attitude of the cultic milieu against dominant trends of mainstream culture, in the present study the discussion with these sources will be about the more specific criticism against the Christian understanding of the divine-human relationship and the related issues of

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36 Introvigne, “After the New Age: Is There a Next Age?”, in: Rothstein, New Age Religion and Globalization, 59; with reference to: Spangler & Thompson, Reimagination of the World, based on research in the late 1980’s.

37 Introvigne, o.c., in Rothstein …., 66.

38 Introvigne, o.c., in Rothstein, 62.

39 Introvigne in: Rothstein, 64-66.

40 See Capra’s criticism above; also his criticism already ventured in The turning point, 462. What Introvigne pictures as a one-way development, changing away from the more or less common Self (New Age) towards everybody’s personal “myself” (Next Age), was distinguished by Heelas as the both ends of the one New Age spectrum, namely as the “spiritually purist” wing over against the prosperity wing, see above: note 29.


42 Kaplan & Lööw (editers), The Cultic Milieu. Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization, see the Introduction, 1-11.
Thus, having sketched the more sociological-historical background, I will now delineate the historical background of the main ideas in the New Age movement.

2.1.2. Historical roots and input

The main ideas that entered and influenced the wide New Age movement came from different sources or fields that can be distinguished from one another, albeit not without mutual overlap. The main sources or fields of origin are Psychology (2.1.2.a), Oriental religion (2.1.2.b), and most importantly Western esotericism (2.1.2.c).

Not enclosed in my account is the field of the so-called neo-paganist movement. This refers to varieties of indigenous spirituality, traditional rituals, and native-religious practices oriented towards living in close connection with nature, soil, and earth. Some examples classed under the heading of neo-paganism are fertility cults, shamanism, witchcraft or Wicca and Goddess spirituality. Whether neo-paganism is part of the New Age movement is a matter of debate.43 I leave it out of my account as most varieties of neo-paganism are not so much focused on the divine-human relationship but more on the human-earth relationship, with the earth or one’s surrounding nature considered to be the “immanent locus of deity.”44 Of the selected sources, Matthew Fox comes most close to the paganist view (2.2.2.b).

2.1.2.a. Psychology

The correlation between psychology and matters of religion and spirituality has a strong and longstanding tradition, especially in American culture. Peter Homans described in a like-named article the so called “Psychology and Religion Movement” about the “peculiarly American concern with psychology and theology”. Homans put William James (1842-1910) at the head of the movement beginning around 1885 and considered the movement as having peaked in the 1950s when, on the side of theology, Paul Tillich was a central figure.45 At that time, the dialogue broke down in the face of a new idea of religion. Until then, the religious focus had largely been on the Christian-Protestant approach of issues like transcendence and faith. But now the religionist idea came to the fore implying that religion is “a universal phenomenon, and that Christian faith was but one instance of it”. As a result, the concentration of those involved in the movement (and of many others) turned towards new versions of religiosity and, also, towards new psychologies.46

Since the early functionalist psychology of James and others, the field of academic and therapeutic psychology in America had been dominated by behaviourism (First force) and Freudian or psychoanalytical psychology (Second force). But in the midst of the century, with the names Carl Rogers (1902-1987) and Abraham Maslov (1908-1970), a new branch called humanistic psychology (Third force) emerged which had a “distinctly Jamesian flavor”47 and in which all emphasis was laid on the inner “human

43 For a discussion of the relationship between neo paganism and New Age, see York, Sociology of the New Age and Neo-pagan Movements; Hanegraaff, New Age Religion, 77-93, esp. 79, considers neo-paganism as “a special, relatively clearly circumscribed subculture” within the New Age movement.
44 York, o.c., 2.
46 Ibid.
47 Homans, o.c., 72.
potential”. It led to the so called human potential movement which became an influential part in the wide New Age movement. This materialized in a spectacular upsurge of self-help groups, transformational therapies and seminar training in the 1970s.

Affinity between James’s “subliminal self” and humanistic psychology is clearly visible in Maslov defining religion in terms of “the furthest reaches of human consciousness”. Self-actualization according to Maslov, instead of leading to solipsism, is the precondition for self-transcendence, both ethically and religiously. This finally led him to hint at a ‘Fourth force’ or transpersonal psychology. Without explicitly attributing religious meanings to this transpersonal level of experience, Maslov did acknowledge that it implies “a transcendence from a doing level of self to the level of being”.

Transpersonal psychology or philosophy can be seen as offering spiritual theories with regard to the human potential movement. Thus it became integral in the corpus of ideas of the New Age movement and of New Age religion. In some developments transpersonal psychology came near to Eastern spiritualities, namely in going beyond what came to be recognized as “the illusion of separate selfhood”. According to the transpersonal theorist Ken Wilber (1949 - ), the essence of all reality is development, the evolutionary “drama” or “playing”, which he designates as “Spirit” or ongoing “evolution of consciousness”. Thus for Wilber, it is not the personal self, but this perennial “evolving through pre-personal, personal and trans-personal” stages that is

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48 It was Maslov who coined the term, see Hanegraaff, New Age Religion, 50. The substance of human potential appears clearly in Rogers’s maxim “that people have within themselves enormous resources for constructive change” as quoted in: Moss, (ed.), Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology, 385 (with reference to: Carl Rogers, Client-centered therapy (1951).

49 See Kovel, Complete Guide to Therapy; for a descriptive enumeration of some main varieties of “self-spirituality”, see Heelas, New Age movement, 51-60: in 1974 USA, there were more than 300 H.P. institutes of which the 1962 founded Esalen institute (Big Sur, California) attracted more than 10.000 participants annually. The common spiritual focus in these seminars and therapies was “to strip outer layers of experience away and return us to ultimate inner unity”, Heelas, 52f, citing Kovel, Complete Guide to Therapy, 199.

50 James had called it the “most important step forward that has occurred in psychology”, the discovery namely “that … there is not only the consciousness of the ordinary field, with its usual centre and margin, but an addition thereto in the shape of a set of memories, thoughts, and feelings which are extra-marginal and outside of the primary consciousness altogether, but yet must be classed as conscious facts of some sort, able to reveal their presence by unmistakable signs … In particular this discovery of a consciousness existing beyond the field, or subliminally … casts light on many phenomena of religious biography”, see James, Varieties, 191f.

51 Homans, o.c., 72, referring to A. Maslov, Religion, Values, and Peak-Experiences (1964). Maslov’s chapter on “Peak-experiences” is enclosed in Bloom, New Age, an Anthology, 118-124. Religious phenomena of revelation and mystical enlightenment are paralleled with “perfectly natural, human peak-experiences of the kind that can easily be examined today” (Maslov in: Bloom, 119).


53 Hastings, o.c., in: Moss o.c., 193; see also 198: experiences are called transpersonal to the extent that “they bring the self into a state that transcends individual ego boundaries”.

54 Hanegraaff, New Age Religion, 50, calling it the “theoretical wing” of the human potential movement.

55 Arons, “Abraham Maslow: Yesterday, Tomorrow and Yesteryear”, in Moss, o.c., 343.
the main thing. In the transpersonal levels of development, one’s self-awareness as a separated self is more and more “transcended in a sense of identity and connectedness that embraces all”. In order to enhance and train this transpersonal development Wilber and many others pointed to meditation practices of eastern spiritualities and other mystical traditions. This brings us to the influence of Oriental religion.

2.1.2.b. Oriental religion

The influence of eastern spiritual ideas in western religious imagination started in the second half of the eighteenth century when some important Hindu scriptures were translated into English. A second wave of influence occurred during and after the World Parliament of Religions (Chicago, 1893) through a group of Hindu representatives that came to America. The most popular speaker among them appeared to be Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) who gathered so much response that he established the Vedanta Society in New York a year later. In 1917 immigration barriers were raised preventing Asians from entering the USA in large numbers. When the barriers were lowered in 1965, a third “wave of Indian gurus found a receptive audience among young Americans seeking religious inspiration from non-traditional sources. For many in the countercultural “cultic milieu” the choice to engage in e.g., Zen was primarily a protest to break free from their entanglement in what they experienced as the rigid rules and claims of mainstream society and religion.

As mentioned above, in the context of exploring human potential and transpersonal spirituality there was a growing attention to eastern spiritual techniques and meditation practices. Self-actualization in terms of humanistic psychology could be strived

56 Vgl. Puhakka, “Ken Wilber: Mapping the Evolution of Consciousness”, in Moss, o.c., 424: “Rather than viewing human development as a matter of the self, evolving in the direction of increased spirituality, Wilber sees it as Spirit evolving (through us) in the direction of greater self-awareness, greater access to interiority, until … the gap between ‘self’ and ‘awareness’ altogether disappears, and the interiority/exteriority dichotomy is transcended in a nondual stance that Wilber calls the superior viewpoint”; about Wilber, see also: Hanegraaff, New Age Religion, 58, 59; Kampschuur, o.c., (417) 89.
57 Puhakka, o.c., 426
58 Puhakka, o.c., 428. According to Heelas, New Age Movement, 57, since the 1960s the Human Potential movement with its trans-personal psychologies has shown “a shift of emphasis away from the neo-Freudian therapeutic legacy to eastern spiritualities”. A similar association of humanistic psychology and eastern philosophy is embodied in Michael Murphy, founder of the Esalen Institute on the wild Big Sur coast of central California, as observed by Ferguson, The Aquarian Conspiracy, 150. See on the still active and exciting Esalen Institute: Kripal, America and the religion of no religion; Kripal & Shuck (eds.), On the edge of the future. Exalen and the Evolution of American Culture; Anderson, The Upstart Spring, Exalen and the Human Potential Movement: The First Twenty Years.
59 The first being the Bhagavad Gita by Charles Wilkins who was a scholar-merchant of the British East India Company, see: Godwin, Theosophical Enlightenment, 309. For a brief overview, see Diem & Lewis, “Imagining India”, in Lewis/Melton (ed.), Perspectives, (48-58), 48: focusing on the USA, Diem and Lewis distinguish three waves of eastern influence.
60 Steyn, Worldviews, 110, observes that Swami Vivekananda’s performance at the World Parliament “… took the delegates by storm”.
61 Diem & Lewis, “Imagining India”, in: Perspectives, 49. The Vedanta Society had influence through publishing activity and has welcomed during its existence some famous members, like e.g., Aldous Huxley whose The Perennial Philosophy (1944) reflects the advaita or non-dualistic teaching of the Vedanta.
62 Diem & Lewis, o.c., in: Lewis & Melton, Perspectives, 49.
63 Steyn, Worldviews, 112, citing Roszak, Making of a counter culture, 137: “… what they readily adopted was a gentle and gay rejection of … the joyless, rapacious, and egomaniacal order of our technological society”. See also: Diem & Lewis, o.c., 56.
for through yoga or through dipping yourself in the identity of the Buddha-mind. In the human potential institute Esalen, the combination between eastern and western wisdom was tried, combining group-talk and group-meditation. Eastern practices like Zen or mantra chanting were adopted by those seeking for self-realization, without necessarily becoming a Buddhist or a Hindu.

A highly influential figure in the New Age was and is Richard Alpert (1931 - ) who, as a successful Harvard psychologist, became dissatisfied with his actual existence and his “Jewish anxiety-ridden high-achieving tradition”. After experimenting with drugs, He was removed from his post at the university. He then left for India in 1967 to return some years later as ‘Baba’ Ram Dass. In Remember be here now (1971), an almanac-like, spiritual cookbook with aphorisms and suggestions for meditation, he tells the story of his spiritual transformation. The book, occasionally referred to as the “new age bible”, was widely read and used in the counter culture which made Ram Dass a prominent figure in the movement. Michael York even considered him “to have set the spiritual groundwork upon which Ferguson’s vision rests”. Ram Dass can be listed among the spiritual purists since he criticized the utilitarian use of eastern meditation techniques in the human potential movement, arguing that meditation in that case does only serve the ego, whereas the real aim should be to transcend the ego towards the freedom of “non-attachment”. Such liberation, he deemed more important than strengthening one’s human potential.

This criticism of Ram Dass raises the question as regards the genuine measure and substance of the oriental influence. When eastern spiritual practices or views are used to serve and accommodate western perspectives and purposes, the influence between the two poles is at least mutual. This brings us to the third and probably most dominant source of influence in the New Age movement for which we need to go into our own (Western) past.

2.1.2.c. Western Esotericism

In New Age Religion & Western Culture, a comprehensive idea-historical analysis of the broad New Age movement is given by Wouter Hanegraaff, qualifying New Age as primarily a Western movement. The spiritual substance of the movement – its belief system designated as New Age religion - is identified by him as a continuation of the history of Western esotericism. Thus, when defining the New Age movement

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64 See Brown, “Baby Boomers, in: Lewis & Melton (eds), Perspectives, 95; also Steyn, Worldviews, 112.
66 Ram Dass, Be Here Now; the book is partly without numeration. In the opening pages Ram Dass tells the story of his ‘turning east’.
67 York, Sociology of the New Age, 53.
68 York, Sociology, 54; see also: Ram Dass, Be Here Now; Ch. 3 (Cookbook for a sacred life, a manual for conscious being). 9: Ram Dass describes non-attachment as the inner or spiritual counterpart of renunciation: “To become free of attachment means to break the link identifying you with your desires. The desires continue; they are part of the dance of nature. But a renunciate no longer thinks that he is his desires”.
69 Because a new or foreign telos for which an existing spiritual practice is used, imports a new meaning to this practice and thus, to some extent, changes it. (fio).
70 For a brief view on the emergence and development of Western esotericism as an academic discipline with its own field of research, see Hanegraaff, “The Birth of Esotericism from the Spirit of Protestantism”, in Aries 10.2 (2010) 197-216; for a thoroughgoing history of Esotericism as most often rejected by mainstream science and religion, see Hanegraaff, Esotericism and the Academy. Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture.
with the help of Campbell’s concept of cultic milieu (2.1.1.a), he notably adds that “all manifestations of this movement are characterized by a popular western culture criticism expressed in terms of a secularized esotericism”.71 Without denying the influx of oriental elements, Hanegraaff opposed the popular idea that the New Age is primarily a product of “oriental renaissance”. Eastern concepts and ideas were also welcomed but “only in so far as they could be assimilated into already-existing western frameworks”.72 Moreover, the main traditions of ideas that have formed these frameworks and that are the main sources of the New Age movement, says Hanegraaff, “can be characterized as Western esotericism”.73

In the present study there is no place for a lengthy analysis of the history of esotericism and its ideas. But given the important role of these ideas in New Age belief-systems, as well as their relevance with respect to the question of recognition/non-recognition of sin, some of the main historical developments and ideas of Western Esotericism must be reviewed. Therefore, I will firstly describe the main line of historical development of Western esotericism as relevant to New Age religion (i. Main historical development). Secondly, I will relate in particular to some more or less central esoteric ideas that entered into the New Age movement, and are also relevant to the question of sin (ii. Two fundamental ideas, and two consequential characteristics). In both parts, I will base myself largely on two seminal works by Wouter Hanegraaff, namely New Age Religion and Western Culture, Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Though (1996), and Esotericism and the Academy. Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture (2012).

2.1.2.c.1. MAIN HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The origin of modern Western esotericism can fairly well be localized in the Italian Renaissance. The publication in 1471 of the translation of a Greek manuscript of the Corpus Hermeticum by Marsilio Ficini, under the title Pimander marks its starting point.74

In the first decades after its appearance, the Corpus Hermeticum was considered to be of ancient age and was highly revered in leading circles as the Florentine Platonic Academy.75 It was assumed to be written by Hermes Trismegistus, a contemporary of no one less than Moses. The work was considered a classic for a little more than a century.76 In 1614, however, a Greek scholar Isaac Casaubon made undeniably clear on

71 Hanegraaff, New Age religion, 522.
72 Hanegraaff, New Age religion, 517; with respect to reincarnation which is a more or less commonly accepted notion in New Age religion, Hanegraaff observes that in western perspectives, the notion is largely subordinate to the idea of “progressive spiritual evolution” (New Age religion, 262). In Europe, ideas about spiritual progress after death (“ascendant metempsychosis”) have their origin in the early eighteenth century in what Lovejoy called the “temporalization of the Great Chain of Being” (New Age religion, 472). To someone like Lessing, as to most New Agers today, spiritual progress was believed to go on beyond the cycle of reincarnations. And, obviously, the ideal of progress does exclude the option of “transmigration into animals” (477).
73 Id., 517f.
75 The Florentine Marsilio Ficini, translator of the Corpus, was leader of the Platonic Academy. According to Hanegraaff, the influence of Platonism, especially neoplatonism, on the esoteric tradition, is so pervasive that it is often not even explicitly mentioned. New Age Religion, 388.
76 New Age Religion, 389. It became the “classic of the age”.
linguistic and stylistic grounds, that the hermetic scriptures could not be dated before the Christian Era which laid “a bomb-shell under the whole edifice of Renaissance Hermeticism”. The tradition of Hermetic-esoteric writings, ideas and related practices went on but became part of a sort of under-current in Western Culture, an alternative “third option”, typified as gnosis. As a “counter-current” it was mostly neglected or explicitly rejected by the two mainstream options, being rational-empirical science and institutional religion. Anything reeking of esotericism (occultism, spiritualism) came to be considered as ir-rational and devoid of any scientific relevance or value. This almost exclusively negative perception only changed in the second half of the previous century. The first academic chair for the study of esotericism, worldwide, was founded in 1965 at the École Pratique des Hautes Études/Sorbonne, and was held by Antoine Faivre. In 1999 a second chair was established at the University of Amsterdam; it has been held since the beginning by Prof. Wouter Hanegraaff, who also directs the associated research group for History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents. Hanegraaff has clearly and determinedly advocated a strictly historical-scientific and etic study of Western esotericism. According to him, Western Esotericism as a relatively new field of scientific research “should be firmly grounded, first and foremost, in a straightforward historiographical agenda”.

Although banished from mainstream religion and science after the exposure of its later age, the Hermetic esotericism as it appeared in the pre-Enlightenment situation of a still enchanted world, did not remain unchanged; it went through the various developments that came from the Enlightenment. Taking the general definition of Antoine Faivre as a foothold, Hanegraaff emphasizes that, like e.g. medieval ideas of mysticism or the occult, Hermetic esotericism, too, has “a history”, namely by going through a process of secularization. Analysing this process, he has distinguished four main developments in the eighteenth and nineteenth century that have influenced and changed esotericism. These are: 1. the new scientific worldview of causality; 2. the new study of (the origin of) religions: 3. the new evolutionism; and 4. the new psychologies. Each of these four developments has had impact on pre-enlightenment

77 New Age Religion, 391.
78 New Age Religion, 518f; Hanegraaff gives credits to Quispel for firstly having coined the typology of “gnosis” as third component of western culture, see Gilles Quispel (ed.), Gnosis. De derde component van de Europese cultuur traditie, Rozekruis Pers: Haarlem 2005 (1988), but also takes distance to Quispel’s religionist leanings (see New Age Religion, 518, nt. 5). Quispel, who was a specialist on gnosis and esoteric currents, approached the field not strictly scientifically but partly from an emic believer’s standpoint. He actually was a warm supporter of the “inner experience” behind gnosis which he also designated as “knowledge of the heart” (kennisse des harten) or with Pascal as raison de Coeur (Quispel, 15). As a “general, quasi-historiographical category” the concept of gnosis was already popularized by F.Chr. Baur (1835), as observed by Hanegraaff, Esotericism and the Academy, 337.
79 New Age Religion, 518; 520: the resulting picture, according to Hanegraaf, is that of “a culture dominated by the two pillars of Christianity and rationalism, plus a sort of counter-current which emphasizes inner knowledge, expressed in non-discursive ways (myth, symbolism etc.)”.
80 Western Esotericism and the Academy, 378.
81 Hanegraaff, New Age religion, 397ff. Faivre had described esotericism as being characterized by four intrinsic features (1. correspondences within reality, 2. reality as living nature, 3. power of imagination or communication through mediations, and 4. Inner aim of transmutation/ transformation) and two extrinsic or possible features (5. praxis of concordance/harmony and 6. transmission of knowledge), see Faivre, L’ésotérisme (1992).
82 Hanegraaff, 374.
83 New Age Religion, 517f: Hanegraff refers to these four developments as “mirrors of secular thought”.

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esotericism in its own way and led to new expressions of esotericism. These are: 1. modern occultism and spiritualism as esoteric attempts to adapt to science; 2. the perspective of religionism based on the Renaissance-hermeticist ideas of *prisca theologia* and *philosophia perennis*; 3. the idea of “progressive spiritual evolution”; and 4. the psychologization of esotericism through a mixture of American transcendentalism and Mesmerism which led to the surge of the so-called metaphysical movements (Christian Science, Mind-cure, New Thought) in the second half of the nineteenth century. These latter movements, also characterized as typical forms of American “Harmonial Religion”, formed the last phase in the secularization process of western esotericism. They entailed the flourishing of popular movements of mind-cure and self-help through the power of mind, now mostly referred to as the *New Thought*. Within these popular movements by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, most of the important aspects of New Age religion were, according to Hanegraaff, already “so fully present that one may wonder whether the New Age movement has brought anything new at all”.

### 2.1.2.c.ii. Two fundamental ideas, and two consequential characteristics

Since becoming a respectable academic discipline, much has been done in the scientific, historic enquiry of Western esotericism with regard to demarcation of the field, defining central ideas, formulation of research goals etc. Especially the way Hanegraaff has derived and defined the origin and scope of Western esotericism, and its main ideas, bears relevance to the central question in this study. Whereas my own subject derives from the criticism on traditional Christianity received from esotericism-inspired New Age perspectives, Hanegraaff, as if the other way around, has defined the origin of Western esotericism (as an identifiable corpus of ideas) as being born from the criticism of traditional (Lutheran-) Protestantism in the seventeenth

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84 For nuanced definitions of these terms, see Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the academy*, 7ff.: *Prisca theologia* presupposes an idea of degeneration of original true knowledge, *perennial philosophy* suggests continuity of the original truth through the ages and among all varieties of the religions. Hanegraaff suggests to distinguish a third option: *pia philosophia* presupposing historical progress or growth of knowledge (9f).

85 Hanegraaff, *New Age religion*, 482-496, refers to Sydney Ahlstrom who coined the term “Harmonial Religion” (494) indicating a pervasive trait in American religion in the second half of the 19th century (and in New Age religion) in which “spiritual composure, physical health, and even economic well-being are understood to flow from a person’s ‘being in rapport with’ the cosmos” or “being in tune with the infinite”.

86 William James, *Varieties* (1902), gives many examples of spiritual conversion and mental (and physical) healing through “mind-cure” which is his designation of the movements of Christian Science and the New Thought. As Daryl Satter, *Each mind*, 241 observes, the academic James “wrote sympathetically about these popular movements of his time.

87 For an extensive study of Christian Science and the several varieties of New Thought, see Satter, *Each mind*.


89 Since their institution in 1999, Hanegraaff and his research group (for *History of Hermetic Philosophy and related currents*), in cooperation with the academic publishing house Brill, have been very prolific in further putting the study of Western Esotericism on the academic map. Among their publications are: *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* since 2001; and the comprehensive Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism, Brill 2005. Profoundly instructive with respect the origin, history, and central ideas of Western esotericism, as well as concerning its scientific method and relevance, is Hanegraaff’s *Esotericism and the Academy* (2012).
century. Initially, this Protestant criticism, as formulated by Jacob Thomasius (1622-1684), was directed against the Hellenization at large of theology and faith. And this groundwork was then applied by Ehrengott Daniel Colberg (1659-1698) against the complex of Platonic-Hermetic-esoteric philosophies in particular. The latter’s polemical *Das Platonisch-Hermetisches Christenthum* can be seen as the first “complete and internally consistent historiographical concept” of what today is studied as Western esotericism. This makes Colberg against his polemic intentions into “a crucial pioneer” of the very phenomenon he rejected.

The main elements in the criticism as developed by Thomasius are also relevant for my own research. His critique has aptly been coined as *anti-apologeticism*. According to the anti-apologetic analysis, the principal heresy of all Greek-Platonic inspired theology is its denial of *creatio ex nihilo*, the doctrine Thomasius considered as fundamental to the Christian belief. The positive, but heretical implication of this denial was, according to Thomasius, the pagan affirmation of the “eternity of the world” which comes down to its co-eternity with God. Thomasius saw this cosmological-theological error present in all Greek philosophy. As summarized by Hanegraaff:

Against the biblical distinction between God and the world, or Creator and creation, paganism made the world eternal like god himself. All heretical beliefs were ultimately grounded in this belief: emanationism (souls or intelligences are not newly created by god but pour forth from his eternal essence), dualism (form and matter, or God and matter, are two co-eternal principles), pantheism (the world is God), and materialism (God is the world). In their different ways, all these variations amounted to deification of the creation at the expense of its Creator.

Once ‘creation from nothing’ is denied, Thomasius detected a second and most injurious heresy, especially present in the Neoplatonic philosophy of emanation and the soul’s return to its source. In anti-apologetic perspective, such cosmology of emanation and return inevitably leads towards the spiritual experience of “enthusiasm” (*Schwärmerei*): the enthusiastic belief of humans in the possibility of “attaining direct experiential knowledge of their own divine nature”, amounting to the “gnostic heresy

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94 Hanegraaff gives all credits to Lehmann-Brauns (*Weisheit in der Weltgeschichte*) for having introduced the term, and for his pioneering work in exploring the anti-apologetic authors with much sophistication and profoundness, see: *Esotericism and the Academy*, 102, nt. 91. The term is adequately chosen, since Thomasius did by no means reject Greek philosophy as such. But with all his learning, he battled against linking pagan philosophy and Christian theology together - which was the old apologetic agenda. According to Lehmann-Brauns, Thomasius’ main intention in analysing the relationship between antique philosophy and Christian Theology was to prevent “der unnützen, ja wohl schädlichen Vereinigung der Heydnischen Philosophie mit der Christlichen Religion”, cited by Lehmann-Brauns from Thomasius’ *Schediasma historicum* (1665), see Lehmann-Brauns, *Weisheit*, 22.
95 Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the academy*, 105.
of auto-salvation and deification by means of a salvational gnosis”.\textsuperscript{96} This spiritual enthusiasm was likewise analysed, and rejected, by Colberg as “immediate inner revelation or illumination”.\textsuperscript{97} Thus, according to the anti-apologetic analysis, the heresy that is implicit in all varieties of Greek/Platonic as well as esoteric spirituality, can be detected by two signifying ideas, namely the adoption of the “eternity of the world” and the “pursuit of [direct] gnosis”.\textsuperscript{98} Whereas Thomasius used both ideas, so to speak, as indicators of heretic paganism, Hanegraaff praises him – of course without adopting his polemic intentions - for his sharp-sightedness as the two indicators still show us “the fundamentals of what can usefully be called Western esotericism”. And given the considerable import of Western esotericism in New Age religion, it comes as no surprise that these fundamental elements are still “crucial to popular and contemporary spirituality”.\textsuperscript{99}

Clearly, the two esoteric fundamentals have explicit bearing on two of the three fixed elements/headings of my research. The idea of co-eternity of Creator and creation is directly relevant to cosmology, while the pursuit of direct knowledge presupposes a certain belief in human potential. Moreover, both ideas also appear to mirror fairly well the two themes I supposed in my initial Introduction to be central in New Age, namely a strong emphasis on divine-human unity or closeness on the one hand, and on human creative-imaginative potential, on the other.

Remarkably, the question of a comprehensible link with the third element, headed as hamartiology, was also touched upon by Thomasius. On the basis of his identification of the two core errors of pagan or Greek philosophies, he went on describing many additional, in his eyes detrimental consequences concerning doctrinal faith. In doing so, he covered all the theological loci, from the doctrine of creation, to soteriology, eschatology, and especially hamartiology.\textsuperscript{100} Prominent among the many unorthodoxies, denounced by Thomasius, are Pelagianism or the “denial of original sin” which he presented as directly proceeding from the (Neo-)platonic assumption of a salvational return of the soul.\textsuperscript{101} Among the related ‘errors’ uncovered by Thomasius are two that especially concern the relational aspect of the traditional concept of sin sensu Plantinga, describing sin as a relation between two persons (1.1.2). One of these additional errors is the denial of a (personal) trans-mundane Creator God.\textsuperscript{102} The other deviation Thomasius identified, is implied in the mystical assumption of the emanated soul’s return to and unification with the divine source. According to him such reunion implied the cancelling out (Aufhebung) of the “immortality of the individual soul” implying the denial of distinct personal identity, what I will desig-

\textsuperscript{96} Hanegraaff, \textit{Esotericism and the academy}, 106; see also 372, where he gives gnosis its precise historical meaning as related to faith and reason: “gnosis … stands … for the possibility of direct and unmediated, supra-rational, salvational access to the supreme spiritual level of reality. … [E]soteric discourse is characterized not so much by claims of higher or perfect knowledge (Von Stuckrad) but, rather, by the claim that direct knowledge of ultimate reality is possible and available for those who pursue it”.

\textsuperscript{97} Hanegraaff, \textit{o.c.}, 114

\textsuperscript{98} Hanegraaff, \textit{o.c.}, 107; 370.

\textsuperscript{99} Hanegraaff, \textit{o.c.}, 370; 372.

\textsuperscript{100} Lehmann-Brauns, \textit{Weisheit}, 75-77.

\textsuperscript{101} Lehmann-Brauns, \textit{o.c.}, 83f; 86: the idea of “self-sufficiency of gaining a sinless predicament” was only too likely a conclusion drawn from the belief in the return of the soul.

\textsuperscript{102} Lehmann-Brauns, \textit{o.c.}, 40, 42f.
nate as the dissolution or denial of the individual soul.\textsuperscript{103} Below, I will gather the distinctions, made so far, in an Inventory Table of contents, in order to use these contents or entries as focal points of attention in my research, now to be outlined.

\textbf{2.1.3. \textit{Methodological deliberations and agenda for research}}

My initial division of the subject under three main headings Cosmology, Hamartiology, and Human potential more or less prompted itself. It seemed clear right from the start that these elements are interconnected which by now can be confirmed by the anti-apologetic argument, stating that the connection is one of logical dependence. Without necessarily adopting his polemic intentions, it seems plausible to state with Thomasius that, a significant amendment of cosmology implies important changes in the corresponding anthropiology and hamartiology. Thus, when the perspective on God as 'creating the world \textit{out of nothing}' is changed into assuming co-\textit{eternity} of a second primordial substance; or when the idea of \textit{creation} from nothing is altered into \textit{emanation} of 'like from like': such alterations will probably lead to a higher evaluation of the ontological standing of creation at large, and of human potential, in particular. A primary example is the enthusiast claim that humans potentially possess direct gnosis of the divine. And proceeding from a thus higher pitched idea of human potential, the doctrine of \textit{original sin}, especially in the sense of a basic human \textit{non posse}, is likely to appear as obsolete.

In addition, the other characteristics – denial of the individual soul, denial of a personal extramundane God – appear as relevant to \textit{actual sin}. In particular, they seem to dismantle those concepts in which sin is strictly explained in personal-relational terms as in the concept of Plantinga (culpable and personal affront to a personal God). Given this concept of sin, it seems inevitable that, when the divine-human relationship is no longer framed in a personal-relational setting, questions like 'what sin is?', or 'who is the sinner?' become impossible to answer.\textsuperscript{104} Now, without accepting the polemic agenda, I will take the anti-apologetic \textit{analysis} as hypothesis, and see if the suggested connections and correlations do exist and can be based on evidence from the sources. Therefore, in the paragraphs on the sources, my agenda for research will be as follows.

\textbf{Agenda for research}

Each source will be explored according to the three main elements of attention as announced in the Introduction: Cosmology; Hamartiology; Human Potential. This will be carried out in the first three parts of the concerning paragraphs. Based on the distinctions made above, I suggest a Table of Four theological Questions and Four anti-apologetic Benchmarks. These entries are intended to be used as points of attention when exploring the sources, and finally to make an inventory of the results. The four Questions are suggested from the side of theology and directly concern the perspective on sin: (1) do the sources state ‘divine-human unity’? (2) do they ‘deny

\begin{footnotesize}
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\textsuperscript{103} Lehmann-Brauns, \textit{o.c.}, 75, 84, and in particular 76: one of the implications of the Platonic doctrine of the (emanation and return of) souls was, according to Thomasius, the “\textit{eschatologischen Aufhebung der Individualität der Seelen}”.

\textsuperscript{104} In any case, this counts for the sinner. According to Thomasius, the idea of the emanated soul’s return means an implicit denial of the soul’s immortality \textit{as an individual entity}, since flowing back into the divine source implies the evaporation of one’s individuation in the flesh and in time. Clearly, the wishful idea that this would render the formerly individual sinner on earth undetectable for the divine ordeal in eternity, is not one Thomasius would want to promote, see: Lehmann-Brauns, \textit{Weisheit}, 75, 84.
\end{footnotesize}
original sin’, especially denying the element of non posse? (3) ‘denial of all evil’? (4) ‘denial of actual sin’? The four anti-apologetic bench-marks (a – d) outlined above, explicitly aim to uncover elements in the sources that are of platonic-esoteric origin, and codetermine the perspective on sin though more indirectly. In short, I will order my investigations on the basis of the following questions:

The Inventory Table of Four Questions and Four anti-apologetic Benchmarks
Do the sources state or teach:
(1) Divine-human unity? (a) Co-eternity?
(2) Denial original sin? (b) Direct gnosis?
(3) Denial of all evil? (c) Denial/dissolution of individual soul?
(4) Denial actual sin? (d) Denial of a trans-mundane personal God?

In the fourth part of each paragraph the inventory will be made of how the sources score on the eight entries, each one receiving a ‘plus’ (+), a ‘minus’ (‒), or a plus-minus (±), meaning ‘yes’, ‘no’, or ‘undecided’. After having explored the three New Age sources (§ 3 – 5), I will look back and forward in paragraph (§ 6. Taking stock) to make the transition towards the theologians Barth and Tillich. In this intermediate paragraph, I will ‘read’ and assess the results that are collected in the Inventory Table with respect to the assumed, anti-apologetic correlation between changes in cosmology and hamartiology. I will formulate provisional conclusions, and notify elements for further attention, to keep in mind when studying the two theologians. But now, I will introduce the three primary sources that will represent the side of New Age.

2.2. INTRODUCTION OF THE THREE SOURCES

The structure and inter-relatedness of the three main elements of exploration is such that what is envisioned under the heading ‘cosmology’ forms the basis of and largely determines the other elements (hamartiology, human potential). The cosmology of a belief-system gives the general picture of the divine-human (God-world, Creator-creation) relationship, while the other two elements (human sin, human potential) comprise more in particular what proceeds in actual existence from the cosmological or ontological foundation. In this sense, I follow the structure of the anti-apologetic analysis. Thus, granting the leading position in any system to the adopted cosmology, and in order to localize the primary sources within the larger field, it will suffice to introduce the main types of Cosmology within the New Age domain in general (2.2.1 New Age cosmologies: different types of holism). The examination of the elements Hamartiology and Human potential will take place only in the specific forms these elements receive in the particular sources of my selection. The cosmological varieties in New Age religion give a first indication as regards my choice of the primary sources. Secondly, I will introduce the three primary sources separately and further account for their selection (2.2.2 Choice of Sources).

2.2.1 NEW AGE COSMOLOGIES: DIFFERENT TYPES OF HOLISM

To say that New Age spirituality is concerned with ‘holism’ seems commonplace.

105 For this description of New Age cosmologies and perspectives on the nature of reality, I will base myself on secondary sources, in particular on the analysis and survey of the matter by Wouter Hanegraaff, New Age religion, 113-158. The modest aim is only to be able to locate the primary sources within the field.
The wholeness of existence, the idea that all parts and aspects of reality are universally interrelated, is pervasive in the wide movement. But there is variation in the way New Agers implicitly or explicitly account for their holism. Explicit and highly sophisticated perspectives on holism can be found in the domain of what is called New Age science. This designation refers to a number of scientists, philosophers and theorists whose theories and ideas became known and to varying extent were adopted in the movement.\textsuperscript{106} What most New Age scientists actually delivered – from the etic point of view – was not strictly (natural) science but rather “philosophy of nature”, which is often referred to with the German designation \textit{Naturphilosophie}.\textsuperscript{107} Actually, such philosophies belong to the field of “belief systems”.\textsuperscript{108} This implies, according to Hanegraaff, that the value of a \textit{Naturphilosophie} and thus of New Age science, like any belief system, does not depend on whether it generates new and strictly scientific knowledge in the sense of natural science. Its value, rather, depends on whether it helps to “make sense of the world of experience”. With respect to that aim, and of course on the condition of not being in contradiction to empirical-natural science, a \textit{Naturphilosophie} is judged by arguments of “internal consistency, philosophical elegance and religious profundity”.\textsuperscript{109} These are the criteria based on inter-subjectivity that are adequate to use in a fair dialogue on the basis of differing cosmologies or belief systems.

Discussing the main New Age perspectives on the nature of reality, Hanegraaff distinguishes some main forms of holism. I restrict myself to the most common types: generative source holism (2.2.1.a) and holism based on universal interrelatedness (2.2.1.b). Apart from these general forms, there are some other types of holism that are less omnipresent in the New Age and therefore less relevant to my inquiry.\textsuperscript{110}

\textbf{2.2.1.a Generative source holism}

This type of holism proceeds from the basic adoption of one “Ultimate Source

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\textsuperscript{106} Names like David Bohm, Fritjof Capra, Ilya Prigogine, Erich Jantsch, Rupert Sheldrake. For a survey of New Age scientists, see Hanegraaff, \textit{o.c.}, 62-76.

\textsuperscript{107} Hanegraaff, \textit{o.c.}, 65f. Referring to Faivre’s definition of philosophy of nature (\textit{Naturphilosophie}) as “focusing on the reality underlying phenomenal reality”, Hanegraaff associates \textit{Naturphilosophie} with “a religious or mystical mode of thinking”, identifying it as “not a secular but a religious philosophy, whether or not its defenders try to present it as such”. Of the three main periods of \textit{Naturphilosophie} in Western history – the Pre-Socratics, the Renaissance and German Idealism - the second and third are closely related to Western esotericism and through this to New Age thinking about the nature of reality.

\textsuperscript{108} Hanegraaff, \textit{o.c.}, 67; In emic discourse, these philosophers of nature - instead of offering their trade as a ‘belief-system’ - often present it as ‘science’ and, similarly, when criticized by (etic) opponents, they are attacked in the name of science all the same. In these cases, Hanegraaff observes drily, “an ideological battle between opposing worldviews is fought out in the arena of science which is simply the wrong place” (66).

\textsuperscript{109} Hanegraaff, \textit{o.c.}, 66. More or less similar standards for sensible argumentation and dialogue between different philosophies of life were prompted by James, \textit{Varieties}, 33, such as “immediate luminousness, philosophical reasonableness, moral helpfulness”.

\textsuperscript{110} Hanegraaff, \textit{o.c.}, 152-155; “organicistic” models of holism (155) such as the Gaia hypothesis: reality based on internal self-organization) and holism described in terms of a dynamic harmony of opposites (152), such as the yin-yang polarity, the male-female distinction, or in Jungian terms the \textit{animus-anima} duality. Especially in the domain of women’s spirituality and neo-paganism (Wicca and fertility cults), the universe is observed as “polarized between masculine and feminine energies”. But the ideal regarding the gender-oriented polarity that is most widely adopted in the New Age movement is to integrate both poles “within” each human being, whether male or female (154). For the relation New Age-Neopaganism see intro 2.1.2.
of Manifestation”111 and is very congenial to developments of Platonism, especially Neo-Platonism112 with its symbol of emanation. As opposed to ‘creation from nothing’, implying a strict separation between the Creator and creation, emanative cosmogonies start with one original source from which all reality is derived, directly or indirectly, leading to “a hierarchical cosmos constituted by levels of spiritual development”. This idea of all levels of reality proceeding from one primal source is, according to Hanegraaff “extremely common in New Age thought”,113 illuminating his point with the example of Jane Roberts acting as ‘channel’ of the higher entity called Seth. Jane Roberts, author of the so-called Seth-books, is one of the primary sources included in my research (§ 3), to be further introduced below.

Similar to the Neo-platonic two-way dynamic of emanation and return, the generative source imagery as ongoing emanative expansion, is often complemented with a reverse or inward movement, amounting to a profound ambiguity in the religious experience. Hanegraaff has revealingly illuminated the core of this ambiguity with reference to observations made by Lovejoy in The great Chain of Being.114 According to Lovejoy, “two Gods” – or two aspects of One God - have entered Western religion through Platonism: not only God as the “generative source of Being” but also – and in some sense perhaps prior to this one – God as “the self-sufficient Absolute”. Both images of God suggest an accompanying religious attitude on the human part which is basic to one’s religious existence and experience. The symbol of the transcendent “self-sufficient Absolute”, like The One Plotinus longed to be reunited with (1.1.1.),115 correlates with an otherworldly stance of the believer, who must reject the actual world as inferior in order to better meet with divine transcendence and perfection. On the other hand, the symbol of emanation from a “generative source” is likely to evoke a rather this-worldly stance. To the extent that emanation pours divine ‘light’ in actual reality, this world is more likely to be affirmed. According to Lovejoy, both contrasting attitudes are longstanding but “contradictory strains in Western intellectual and religious history”.116

As regards the New Age movement and New Age religion, generative source holism and its accompanying stance of positive thinking and this-worldliness are by far the most common, whereas the otherworldly attitude, corresponding with the idea of an original “Self-sufficient Absolute”, occurs less frequently and less explicitly, though it is certainly not absent. The major example of such a strongly other-worldly spirituality in the New Age corpus is A Course in Miracles (ACiM)117 included below as one of the primary sources (§ 4).

The two selected sources (Roberts and ACiM) reflect a basic ambiguity in the religious experience of reality which is practically omnipresent. Based on Lovejoy’s distinction, Hanegraaff concludes that “the pervasive duality between otherworld-

111 See on this type Hanegraaff, o.c., 120-127.
112 Hanegraaff, o.c., 122; see also 388 about the close affinity between neo-Platonism and the hermetic-esoteric tradition.
113 Hanegraaff, o.c., 123.
114 Lovejoy, Great Chain of Being; the book contains the William James lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1933.
115 Similar expectation was held by Socrates in Plato’s dialogue Phaedo, see below 9.2.b.i.
116 Lovejoy, o.c., 315, 316 referred to by Hanegraaff, o.c., 121.
117 Hanegraaff, o.c., 126.
liness and this-worldliness is paralleled by a duality between two conceptions of Ultimate Reality/God as either radically transcendent or immanent in creation”.

118 Compared to Thomasius’ anti-apologetic analysis, this appears to be a more general form of correlation between the ontology or cosmological picture of God, on the one hand, and the character of one’s religious belief and attitude in life, on the other. The assumption is: if one embraces a theology of a highly transcendent, absolute God, having created the world as originally perfect, then one’s spirituality is likely to be of the other-worldly type, accompanied by a religious attitude of world-criticism or even world-rejection. Generally speaking, such basic outlook may well go along with a keener eye for sin. By contrast, the theological adoption of a more immanent God, as an indwelling power within creation, is likely to be accompanied by a more this-worldly spirituality, a religious attitude of world-affirmation and enhancement. In such a mood, one will be enthralled by ideas about human potential, rather than sin. It is useful to keep these two spiritual or religious “varieties” in mind, also to take along the supposed correlation between doctrine and experience, in combination with the benchmarks derived from the anti-apologetic argument (2.1.3).

2.2.1.3 Universal Interrelatedness

The versions of holism that are discussed by Hanegraaff under the heading “Universal Interrelatedness” predominantly belong to the domain referred to above as New Age science. Some of these concepts and theories are highly complicated which, however, does not prevent them from being “in various degrees of popularization or simplification … widely influential throughout the New Age movement”.

120 A well-known example is the so-called “Gaia-hypothesis” (Lovelock) envisioning the world as a “living organism” or self-organizing “system”. As a detailed survey of the field is not relevant to my agenda, I will limit myself to some general characteristics, only in order to localize the third primary source within the field, Matthew Fox (§ 5).

As distinguished from generative source holism, the worldviews under the heading “Universal interrelatedness” are unconcerned with the origin of the universe, as they actually take “the absence of a Source or other ontologically privileged Centre” for granted. They are primarily focused on the world’s “present nature and constitution”. The nonappearance of a divine reality beyond this world involves a non-theistic stance. A creator-God in personal terms standing over against creation is not envisioned. Instead, the various versions of Universal Interrelatedness tend to have “an unambiguously monistic character” which, according to Hanegraaff, can be

118 Hanegraaff, o.c., 121; Lovejoy, o.c., 316.

119 A similar typology of two contrasting types of spiritual-religious attitudes was (indeed) given by William James (Varieties of Religious Experience 1902). Approaching different examples of religious experience from a functionalist-psychological point of view, he distinguished between the religion of healthy-mindedness (world-affirming this-worldliness) and the spiritual attitude of the sick soul (world-denying other-worldliness).

120 Hanegraaff, New Age religion, 128.

121 The analysis by Hanegraaff (o.c., 128-151) covers varieties of Universal Interrelatedness, like Parallelism between modern physics and Eastern mysticism and Bootstrap Philosophy (G.Chew, Fritjov Capra (128ff)); Systems Thinking (Gregory Bateson, Ilya Prigogine, Fritjov Capra (132ff)); reality as “organism”, as e.g., Gaia hypothesis (139; also 155f. James Lovelock), and Holographic images of reality, the Holographic Paradigm (139-149), representing an implicate order according to which “the whole is present in each of its parts” (Karl Pibram, David Bohm).

122 Hanegraaff, o.c., 128, meaning there being only one reality, one ontological substance.
labelled “pantheism” as long as God is not seen as a “substance” that could anyhow be separated. God, then, is seen as entirely immanent, as the “very dynamics of self-organization” implied in the universe, he is “the pattern that connects” (Bateson). In this sense, Fritjov Capra can describe the universe as a self-regulating system or organism, and simultaneously agree with Erich Jantsch saying that “God is not the creator, but the mind of the universe”. This means, according to Capra, that “the deity is, of course, neither male nor female, nor manifest in any personal form, but represents nothing less than the self-organizing dynamics of the entire cosmos”. Apparently, the assumed nonexistence of a specific Source, a divine Person or Creator does not imply the absence of religious pathos, nor of God talk. Now, similar form of holism in which the cosmos is considered as a “unique living being” and simultaneously as “filled with God” is professed by Matthew Fox (§ 5). For Fox, God, the universe, and creation are hard to separate. They merge together in his enthusiastic view of cosmic spirituality culminating in the assertion that “to explore the cosmos is to explore God”.

This brief survey of the two most common types of New Age cosmology may suffice to give a first localization of the selected sources. Both ‘generative source holism’ (Jane Roberts) and holism based on actual and immanent ‘universal interrelatedness’ (Matthew Fox) endorse a this-worldly attitude of world affirmation that is almost omnipresent in the New Age corpus. Remarkably deviant, but as a counter position potentially instructive, is the peculiarly other-worldly perspective of A Course in Miracles. Its view on reality as fully transcendent approximates perhaps most the idea of a “self-sufficient Absolute”. But actually, ACiM with its steep monism and total denial of the outer world is difficult to list among one or the other of the two cosmological types. The main reason for its inclusion lies in the central theme of its content which I will further explain below.

### 2.2.2 Choice of primary sources

The three sources that will be analysed are 1. Jane Roberts and her Seth books; 2. A Course in Miracles (further referred to as ACiM); and 3. the writings of the former Dominican Matthew Fox. To account for their inclusion I will, firstly, discuss some general criteria (a) and then motivate the selection of each source in particular (b).

#### 2.2.2.a. Some general criteria

The first general and obvious criterion is that the three sources must be characteristic for the New Age, each separately and as a combination. Concerning the combination, it is important that the three together cover the diversity of the New Age worldviews at large. With respect to the content of ideas, this criterion has been met, already, in the previous section. Jane Roberts’ worldview is a clear example of ‘generative source holism’, while ACiM can be said to represent the other side of the same coin: only adopting holistic reality in an ‘absolute transcendent’ sense. The ecumenist monk, Matthew Fox, strongly focusing on the concrete world or cosmos, can be listed among those emphasizing an immanent and ‘universal interrelatedness’. The repre-

123 Hanegraaff, o.c., 139.
124 Capra, F., Turning point, 292 as cited by Hanegraaff, o.c., 139.
125 Fox, M., Original Blessing, 70.
126 Hanegraaff, 149, referring to Fox, Original Blessing, 69-70.
sentativeness of the sources and the extent to which they express widely shared New Age beliefs can be gauged indirectly through the response they have generated, the measure of their being read and discussed. In this respect the three selected sources have a good score. The works of all three have been widely read and seriously reflected upon by a large audience, of both believers and observers. Below I will specify this for each source separately.

The second general and inevitable precondition for inclusion of each source is the simple necessity that the source must be relevant to my subject. Although perspectives on the divine-human relationship are omnipresent in New Age writings and literature, mostly coupled with a high esteem of the inner (divine) human potential, the number of authors that have uttered themselves explicitly on the subject of sin is much smaller. On this point all the tree sources qualify for inclusion.

A third general condition concerns the level of style and performance, as implied in the triplet of intersubjective criteria for any Philosophy of life in order to be taken seriously: “internal consistency, philosophical elegance and religious profundity” (2.2.1. intro). If one is really searching for truth, one should never choose a weak opponent to enter into a critical dialogue but only the most original and abled. Jane Roberts has been referred to as the “undisputed classic of channelling”127 and has been praised for her intelligence and imagination, style and literary talents128. *ACIM*, partly written in poetic iambic pentameters Shakespearean style, is also said to impress “by its flawless consistency over a length of more than 1100 pages.129 It is translated in several languages, always under the strict authority of the *ACIM*-foundation by a team of specialized translators, a procedure which seems suitable for a sacred text.130 The works of Matthew Fox are marked with a critical, creative, and never failing optimism. He has given lectures in practically all states of the USA. His voice was substantial enough to arouse the counteraction of cardinal Ratzinger, who represented at that time the doctrinal sword of the Vatican.131

2.2.2.b. THE THREE SOURCES

In addition to these general criteria, I will finally add some grounds for inclusion regarding each source in particular.

I. JANE ROBERTS (SETH)

The choice for Jane Roberts (and her channelled entity Seth) can be justified on account of the great influence that her *Seth books*, published in the early 1970s, have had both directly, on many individual readers; and indirectly through other New Age

127 Hanegraaff, o.c., 28.
128 Hastings, *With the tongues of men and angels*, 72f., praises her writing as “excellent and more poetic and imagistic than Seth’s ...”. According to Hanegraaff, o.c., 37. both Seth (the source) and Roberts (the channel or medium) appear as “highly intelligent” which is also reflected in “the considerable complexity of the material”.
129 Hanegraaff, o.c., 38.
130 The Dutch translation (*Een Cursus in Wonderen*, Uitgeverij Ankh Hermes: Deventer 1999) was published under the supervision of the Committee for translation, representing the Foundation for *A Course in Miracles* (dr. Kenneth Wapnick) and the Foundation for Inner Peace (dr. William W, Whitson). Chief editor of the Dutch version is Willem Glaudemans.
131 One of Fox’s more recent books is a critical screening of his former adversary and leaves little doubt concerning the abyss that is between them: Fox, *The Pope’s War. Why Ratzinger’s secret crusade has imperiled the Church and how it can be saved* (2011).
authors, many of whom have acknowledged their indebtedness to her.\textsuperscript{132} The impact of Roberts and her “metaphysical teamwork” with Seth on New Age religion is unequivocally expressed by Hanegraaff, observing that it is “hardly an exaggeration to regard Jane Roberts as the Muhammad of New Age religion, and Seth as its angel Gabriel”.\textsuperscript{133} As they have played such a pivotal and originating role in the cultic milieu that fostered the New Age movement, it is only plausible to start with Roberts/Seth (§ 3), which will simultaneously offer us a useful introduction into the wider field.

\section*{II. \textit{A Course in Miracles}}

It is clear already that \textit{A Course in Miracles} is a special case\textsuperscript{134}. Whereas by far most of New Age perspectives and attitudes vary from a mild to a strong stance of this-worldliness or world-affirmation, the perspective of \textit{ACiM} is characterized by a strongly world-denying or other-worldly inspiration. Although this characterization of \textit{ACiM} must be nuanced, its deviant status within the New Age domain is obvious and therefore, as a counterpoint, it’s inclusion is helpful to get a better picture of the whole field of ideas. One evaluative question to be asked is to what extent one’s perspective on sin is evoked or co-determined by one’s basic and often pre-conscious attitude of either this-worldliness or other-worldliness? On this point, too, \textit{ACiM} will proof to be atypical which supplies for the most obvious and substantial reason for inclusion, namely some essential \textit{ACiM} perspectives on the question of sin. This becomes clear immediately when we realize that the “miracle” that is central to its teaching is called the “miracle of forgiveness”. Even though the notion “forgiveness” will appear to have a meaning within \textit{ACiM} that is somewhat deviant from its use in traditional Christianity, the concerning perspectives obviously border on the element of hamartiology and are relevant to the doctrine of sin. Moreover, \textit{ACiM} has inspired not only many of its readers or students directly, but indirectly also many others – some of its central principles (like forgiveness, countering victim behaviour, etc.) being widely disseminated through the popular TV shows by Oprah Winfrey, as well as through some best-selling authors\textsuperscript{135}.

\section*{III. Matthew Fox}

The source that has most clearly and explicitly busied himself with the traditional Christian concept of sin is Matthew Fox. Starting his spiritual career as a Dominican priest and a Christian theologian, he was a warm supporter of the Second Vatican

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{132} Later authors have generously expressed their indebtedness to Roberts/Seth, like Marianne Williamson (\textit{A Return to Love}, 1992), Deepak Chopra (\textit{Ageless Body, Timeless Mind}, 1993), Louise Hay (\textit{You can heal your life}, 1984), Shakti Gawain (\textit{Living in the light}, 1986), Sanaya Roman (\textit{Living with joy}, 1986); Dan Millman (\textit{The way of the peaceful warrior}, 1980); Gerald G. Jampolsky (\textit{Love is letting go of fear}, 1979).
\item \textsuperscript{133} Hanegraaff, o.c., 126.
\item \textsuperscript{134} Hanegraaff, o.c., 365, observes that \textit{ACiM}, though often regarded as New Age, is “decidedly atypical”.
\item \textsuperscript{135} See Eckhart Tolle (\textit{The Power of Now. A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment}, 1999); Marianne Williamson (\textit{A Return to Love}, 1992). Williamson’s book carries as subtitle: \textit{Reflections on the Principles of A Course in Miracles}. No one less than Nelson Mandela, in his inaugural speech as president of the Republic of South Africa, quoted some lines Williamson herself had derived directly from her studying \textit{ACiM}: “As I interpret the Course, ‘our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us’. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you \textit{not} to be?” , see Williamson, \textit{A Return to Love}, 190f.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Council and its liberating spirit. His focus of interest changed from institutional religion towards a much more personal and natural spirituality, treasuring the living cosmos and its indwelling dynamism of the divine word. Strongly criticizing the Church and, what he called, its male-dominated Fall/Redemption tradition, he wrote *Original Blessing* (1984) which referred to the blessing of creation and its inner spur towards a cosmic or “creation spirituality”. Fox’ work and writing led to reinforced doctrinal and political pressure from the Vatican that finally made him leave his order. Thus, Fox is the Christian theologian among the sources while simultaneously representing the New Age movement. Fox is a real ‘acceptor’ of all kinds of spiritual expression and religiosity varying from Christian mysticism of all times to native American religion and even neo-pagan or Wicca spirituality. Heelas has typified him as a “highly Pelagian and immanentist Christian” of whom it is impossible to say whether he is “best regarded as a Christian or as new Age”\(^{136}\). Actually, this sounds like a definite recommendation for inclusion.

PART TWO: PRIMARY SOURCES OF NEW AGE RELIGION

The presentation of each of the primary sources will begin with some biographical notes on the author and a general picture of the nature of his/her work. Then the procedure will be followed as proposed above, in the Methodological agenda (2.1.3). Each paragraph will consist in four subsections: 3.1 Cosmology, 3.2 Hamartiology, 3.3 Human potential, and 3.4 Inventory of findings – application of the benchmarks. After the three sources have been explored, I will review the findings in a separate intermediary paragraph (§ 6 Taking Stock) in which I will also make the transition towards the theologians Barth and Tillich. I will evaluate the findings of the New Age sources and collect elements that need further consideration and may be brought into dialogue with the theologians.

§ 3. Jane Roberts (1929-1984)

Starting her literary career as a poet and writer of science fiction, Dorothy Jane Roberts became famous through her books based on “channeled” messages that she received from a “spiritual entity” called Seth.¹ Her early life had been troubled with the divorce of her parents when she was an infant and the psychotic illness of her invalid, rheumatic mother. After living for some years in a Roman Catholic orphanage, she returned home and was charged with caring for her diseased and demanding mother. Early attempts at writing at the orphanage were considered “heretical” by the nuns, but in her senior year in high school, her poems earned her a scholarship to Skidmore College (Saratoga, N.Y.). At the end of her first year, however, she was expelled for an alleged breach of “Social Discipline” on account of having attended an all-night party at a professor’s house.² She put her mother in a nursing home and left with her boyfriend, Walter Zeh, on a journey to visit her father in California. They returned to Saratoga, got married and worked various jobs to earn a living. In 1953 they split up by mutual consent after Jane had fallen in love with Robert F. Butts (1919-2008), a painting artist, who was to become her life-partner. She continued writing poetry and started writing science-fiction, the first fruits of which was entitled “The red wagon” (1956) and which dealt with “past-life memories. Her stories and novels contained elements of “apocalypticism”, anxiety for an “impending nuclear holocaust”, as well as a “strong interest in the untapped potentials of the human mind”.³ The year 1963 had been a poor one for both Roberts and Butts⁴ when, on a quiet September evening, she was suddenly overwhelmed with – in her own words – a “trip without drugs …”.

… Between one normal minute and the next, a fantastic avalanche of radical, new ideas burst into my head with tremendous force, as if my skull were some sort of receiving

¹ These biographical remarks are derived from: Watkins, S.M., Speaking of Jane Roberts, 13-26; the lemma “Roberts”, in: DGWE (II), 997-1000; and works of Jane Roberts herself.
² Watkins, Speaking, 17; according to later remarks by Walter Zeh, her old boyfriend, she was the only student punished while “the other girls, all of them members of wealthy families and seniors, got off ‘scot-free’”.
³ DGWE, 997.
⁴ Watkins, o.c., 20; her third sf-novel got published in a poor edition, Roberts had severe back trouble, her pet dog died, and she felt herself uncertain about how to move on with her writing. As she would later write in The Seth Material, 9: “Perhaps, all unknowing, I had reached a crisis and my psychic abilities awoke as the result of inner need”.

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station, turned up to unbearable volume. Not only ideas came through this channel, but sensations, intensified and pulsating. I was tuned in, turned on … connected to some incredible source of energy. … It was as if the physical world were really tissue-paper thin, hiding infinite dimensions of reality, and I was suddenly flung through the tissue paper with a huge ripping sound. My body sat at the table … yet I seemed to be somewhere else, at the same time, travelling through things. I went plummeting through a leaf, to find a whole universe open up; and then out again, drawn into new perspectives. I felt as if knowledge was being implanted in the very cells of my body so that I couldn’t forget it – a gut knowing, a biological spirituality. It was feeling and knowing, rather than intellectual knowledge ….

When Roberts came back to normal consciousness, it appeared that she had made notes entitled The Physical Universe as Idea Construction. In the following months she and her husband buried themselves in studying extrasensory perception (ESP). They started practising with a Ouija board which spelled out messages supposedly coming from a “Frank Withers” who claimed to have encountered Jane and Robert in a previous life and in the last life had died in the 1940s. In another session he announced that he preferred to be called Seth. After some time, it appeared that communication could be realized more rapidly without the board. From then on, their meetings became “channelling” sessions that they planned on a regular basis. During these sessions, Jane “would go into ‘full trance’ while Seth ‘possessed’ her body and spoke through her with a male voice … Robert Butts would converse with Seth and note down the questions and answers in shorthand”. The transcripts of these sessions would become the direct basis for a series of Seth-books: The Seth Material (1970), Seth Speaks: The Eternal Validity of the Soul (1972) and The Nature of Personal Reality. A Seth Book (1974).

Reflecting on her own “mediumistic” role in relationship to Seth, Roberts has noted that the content of the Seth-books was written “through me” but also “without my conscious mind”, thus concluding that her books came from “a specific source” and that they were coloured “by the author’s personality which is not mine”. However, her third Seth book contains an “Introduction by Jane Roberts”, as well as a “A preface by Seth”. Roberts took pride in publishing the book “under my own name”. She considered the book as “mine”, believing that it could not have been written without “me and my particular abilities”. In doing so, she attempted to transcend the dilemma - forced on her by fully fledged spiritualists and sceptics alike - of seeing Seth either as “an independent spirit” or as some “displaced portion of my own personality”. In her view – which is identical to that of Seth - each human being is actually a “fragment personality” unconsciously participating in a larger group-entity or oversoul.

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5 Roberts, Seth Material, 10.
6 DGWE, 998.
7 Seth Material, Seth Speaks and Nature of Personal Reality: from now on referred to as SM; SS; and NPR.
8 SS, xv; Roberts had to read her husband’s verbatim accounts afterwards in order to know what she had actually been saying as Seth.
9 NPR, IX-XI.
10 In my account I (ffo) will attribute opinions and views equally to either Roberts or Seth without distinction, based on the supposition that both the source and the medium are entirely interchangeable.
11 DGWE, 998.
Some years after her life as a medium had begun, Roberts experienced the first symptoms of rheumatic arthritis which worsened over the years. In the late 1970s she also developed thyroid problems, but she refused regular medical treatment until a very late stage. After a long and difficult sickbed, she died in 1984. Since then, some additional Seth books have been published posthumously by her husband Robert Butts.

3.1. COSMOLOGY

In the survey of different types of holism (2.2.1.a), it appears that the holistic worldview of Roberts/Seth amounts to a cosmology in which all conscious being is presented as originating from an ultimate generative source. Actually, any entity of consciousness is envisioned both as emanating from a primordial all-encompassing Source (“All That Is”) and, in turn, as acting itself as a new wellspring through which further reality is created. The resulting worldview is that of “an incredibly rich and dazzling kaleidoscope of imaginary worlds”. This worldview is based on two ontological presuppositions. The first is that mind and reality, consciousness and being are largely identified, in such a way that priority is given to the mind. Next to this, there is a second priority, namely of good over evil. In this section on cosmology, I will first discuss these two basic presuppositions of the Sethian worldview (a. Two ontological priorities). Then, I will discuss the main elements in this worldview: b. Outer and inner consciousness, c. Inner self and soul, d. The ultimate source “All That Is” and e. Divine-human relationship.

3.1. a. TWO ONTOLOGICAL PRIORITIES

It belongs to the nature of reality that all our actions “are initially mental acts”. Moreover, all mental acts are taken to be “valid”, which means that they have ontological significance *eo ipso*. Mental acts, according to Seth, “exist and cannot be negated”. The implication is that the ‘mind’, which is always framed as an entity or configuration of consciousness, is creative by nature. Any such entity of mind or consciousness, any self or ego is *inevitably* engaged in processing further being, both spiritual and “probable”, and even physical:

> You create reality through your feelings, thoughts, and mental actions. Some of these are physically materialized, others are actualised in probable systems. You are presented with an endless series of choices, it seems, at any point, some more or less favourable than others. You must understand that each mental act is a reality for which you are responsible …

The underlying assumption is a fundamental element in the belief system advocated in Roberts’ Seth books with both spiritual-epistemic and ontological implications. It implies that the “essential distinction between ‘objective reality’ and subjective realities (experienced in dreams, trance states, past life memories etc.) breaks down

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12 Ibid.
14 Hanegraaff, *New Age religion*, 125.
15 *SS*, 226.
16 *SS*, 238.
completely". On this basis Seth can assure his audience that “you create your own reality according to the nature of your beliefs” which rings like idealistic dependence of reality on human categories of perception, beliefs and consciousness. It means that cosmology and anthropology are two sides of one coin, or even that the former appears through the latter. This explains why my discussion of the main elements in the Sethian worldview (subsections b – d), actually begins with the view on human being and consider the ever-widening circles or entities of consciousness: from outer ego, inner self, multidimensional entity or soul to All-That-Is as the primordial source. Thus we will enter the cosmological building through the anthropological door which, as Roberts/Seth see it, does not involve a change of subject matter but only the widening of perspective.

Apart from the ontological priority of mind, there is a second priority in the ontology of Roberts and Seth, namely of good over evil. This will be discussed under the second and third element of attention. Their idea of ‘evil’, especially with respect to religious evil (sin), will be discussed in under Hamartiology (3.2) and their idea of what is ‘good’, which is actually about creative consciousness, is brought up under Human Potential (3.3).

3.1.b. OUTER AND INNER CONSCIOUSNESS

The two most immediate, anthropological elements of a concrete living person are one’s outer and inner consciousnesses that are respectively managed by the outer ego and the inner self. Most people identify themselves entirely with the former, which is their “daily physically oriented self”. What they see and perceive with their outer senses is what they think they are, refusing to go beyond, as if hypnotized by their own “limited concepts”. In contrast to the outer ego, the inner self is able to transcend actual physical existence and to digest information that is acquired through other inner channels. Actually, this “self” is the inner perceiver of reality that exists beyond the three-dimensional. It carries within it the memory of each of your past existences. It looks into subjective dimensions that are literally infinite, and from these subjective dimensions all objective realities flow. All necessary information is given to you through these inner channels, and unbelievable inner activities take place before you can so much as lift a finger … The “outer ego” and the inner ego operate together, the one to enable you to manipulate in the world that you know, the other to bring you those delicate inner perceptions without which physical existence could not be maintained.

Obviously, the inner self is by far the superior of the outer ego as regards spiritual awareness, subtle perception, consciousness and wisdom. Seth observes that the inner

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17 Hanegraaff, o.c., 227; he refers to Stanislav Grof (Beyond the Brain), a strong advocate for the genuine reality (which is not just an intrapsychic reality) of transpersonal experiences. The result is that “whatever I [subjectively] experience [as real] is real”.
18 See also SS, 163; SM, 246 (responsibility for your own life).
19 In the Seth books the words “self” and “ego” are used interchangeably (see SM, 300). The basic distinction is given with the difference between outer versus inner, physical versus spiritual, limited versus less limited, etc. The distinction between the limited ‘outer ego’ and the boundless awareness of the ‘inner or higher self’ has become part of the lingua franca of New Age religion.
20 SS, 8; 6.
21 SS, 9; see also SM, 301: The outer ego is formed, according to Seth, from a part of the inner self’s energy as its “material counterpart: “The outer ego then acts out a play that the inner self has written”.
56
part of you is “quite natively clairvoyant and telepathic”, that you are “warned for di-
sasters”, even if you do not consciously accept the message. The inner self is localized
in what psychologists call “the unconscious” to which the outer ego-consciousness
normally has no access. But actually, this realm of the unconscious is not devoid of
consciousness at all, since it also has its ‘ego’ or ‘self’, its own centre of awareness.
This is the inner ego (inner self) that “organizes what Jung would call unconscious
material”.22 Thus the outer ego, which we normally call our consciousness, is actually
“not conscious enough to be able to contain the vast knowledge that belongs to the
inner conscious self ... ”.23

3.1.c. INNER SELF AND THE SOUL

The inner self is not the deepest or farthest, nor broadest entity, of who we are. It
is aware of itself as “an individuality apart from others” and, simultaneously, as “an
individuality that is a part of all other consciousness”.24 This implies a further dimen-
sion of human consciousness in which one’s inner self is associated in a “sympathetic
relationship” with other selves.25 Together these form a “multidimensional personal-
ity” that is also called “entity” or “soul”. It is here that, according to Seth, our “most
intimate powerful inner identity” is situated.26 Consequently, this ‘group entity’ or
soul is called your “prime identity”, described as

in itself a gestalt of many other individual consciousnesses – an unlimited self that is yet
able to express itself in many ways and forms and yet maintain its own identity, its own “I
am-ness”, even while it is aware that its I am-ness may be part of another I am-ness. Now I
am sure it may seem inconceivable to you, but the fact is that this I am-ness is retained even
though it may ... now merge with and travel through other such energy fields. There is, in
other words, a give and take between souls or entities, and no end of possibilities, both of
development and expansion ... .27

Apparently, the soul is not envisioned as a static “thing” that exclusively belongs
to one human individual. Instead, the individual is seen as part of a soul, as one of
its co-creating fragments. Far from being an unchanging, impenetrable “citadel”, the
soul is “an open spiritual system, a powerhouse of creativity that shoots out in all
directions”.28 Every new thought, perception, and/or experience is a new creation that
expands the ‘self’ as well as the soul in which it participates. Presenting the soul as
our prime identity, Seth seems well aware of the friction between a fundamentally
open-ended soul and, on the other hand, the regular and much more static notion of

22 SM, 300; special reference is made to Jung.
23 SM, 301.
24 SM, 301”; As Seth makes clear through his medium: “In your terms, it is continually aware, both of this
apartness and unity-with”.
25 See SS, 90; also 94, where Seth observes that originally, he himself, Jane (whom he calls Ruburt), and
Robert (whom he calls Joseph) were part of one and the same entity.
26 SS, 70. Seth argues that he prefers the notion “entity” to “soul” as he deems the latter tainted with
misunderstandings caused by official religions. Still, he (or Roberts) seems to have little difficulty in
continuing to use the notion soul (consider, e.g., the subtitle of SS: The eternal validity of the Soul and
some Chapter titles). The term “entity” is also used to denote larger and/or still further evolved group-
ings of consciousness.
27 SS, 83; also: SS, 71: “the soul is always in a state of flux, or learning, and of developments ...”
28 SS, 76.
soul and identity: with connotations of continuity, being yourself in distinction from others, authenticity, remaining recognizable as the person you are. However, Roberts’ speaker considers the fear of losing your individual identity as a typical drawback of the outer ego. According to him, the soul’s identity is rather built on notions as creativity, interaction, freedom, progressive development. Thus, the soul is like a spiritual commune of kindred selves, a “multidimensional personality” that is open to all sides as “all of existence and consciousness is interwoven”. Moreover, the soul is the individual’s inner gateway towards participation in ever expanding structures of consciousness and endlessly further refined levels of inner reality, the soul-entity being “man’s mediator with ‘All That Is’”. The latter notion refers to the original source of all reality or consciousness.

3.1.d. The ultimate source “All That Is” and God

The notion “All That Is”, which we have approached now, as it were, from ‘below’, is a cosmological and a theological one. It signifies the ultimate generative origin of all reality within the Sethian cosmo-theology. The notion appears in the first Seth book in a genuine cosmogony which can rightly be called a “myth of emanation” amounting to the procession of all reality from “All That Is”. All That Is is identified as a “primary consciousness gestalt” or even as an “absolute, ever-expanding, instantaneous psychic gestalt, which you may call God if you prefer”. The psychic gestalt “All That Is” contains such enormous energy that it generates “all universes”.

29 SS, 76: “… you are so afraid for your sense of identity that you resist the idea that the soul … is an open spiritual system …”; 72: “there are no limitations to your own entity: … how can your entity or soul have boundaries, for boundaries would enclose it and deny it freedom”; 77: “while you hold limited concepts of your own reality, then you cannot practically take advantage of many abilities that are your own; and while you have a limited concept of the soul, … you cut yourself off from the source of your own being and creativity”. See also SM, 212, where the ego-anxiety is voiced by Roberts herself: “Having a whole self may be great, but if my Jane Roberts self is engulfed by it after death, then to me that’s not much of a survival. It’s like saying that the little fish survives when it’s eaten by a bigger one because it becomes part of it”. Nevertheless, according to Seth “no individuality is ever lost” (212). You only have to remember “that all of you are more than you know. … The self that you call yourself is but a small portion of your entire identity”.

30 SS, 360.

31 SS, 328.; for ever larger structures of consciousness, see SS, 213, where Seth lectures about groups of people that have realized such a “level of development” that they have left the re-incarnational cycle, only to form “new groupings” in other dimensions as “they were spiritually and psychically mature, and were able to utilize energies of which you now have no practical knowledge”. Even so, “they are evolved into the mental entities they always were” (italics mine) and, although no longer reincarnating, these purely “mental entities” are still concerned with the human beings on earth, lending it “support and energy. In a way, they could be thought of now as earth gods”. For similar expositions, see SM, 221-235 (Ch. 17). Here, Seth appears again to be connected with a still further evolved entity, a “Seth that is beyond the Seth you know” (235), to whom he jokingly refers as his Big Brother (SM, 230); see also 3.1.e (SS, 228).

32 Hanegraaff, New Age Religion, 122.

33 SM, 240-246.

34 SM, 240.

35 SM, 237; see also 240 where Roberts observes that “Seth uses the word God sparingly”, namely when accommodating to students used to thinking in theological terms. But normally he rather “speaks of All That Is or Primary Energy Gestalts” (the latter indication apparently in the plural! -comment mine).

36 SM, 237v: An allusion is made to Christian providence when Seth observes regarding All That Is: “Its energy is so unbelievable that it does indeed form all universes; and because its energy is within and behind all universes, systems, and fields, it is indeed aware of each sparrow that falls, for it is each sparrow that falls”. This last remark rings as a pantheistic overtone.
Its purpose is the extension or expansion of “being, as opposed to nonbeing” - non-being not intended as evil or “nothingness” but as potential or probable being that is “anticipated but blocked from expression”. According to Seth’s creation myth, All That Is thus experienced the procreative state of “agony”, an accumulating “impetus” towards creativity until “the psychic energy exploded in a flash of creation” discharging into a self-repeating process since the creative urge became the inner nature of all realized emanations:

Each self, as a part of All That Is, … also retains memory of that state [of agony]. It is for this reason that each minute consciousness is endowed with the impetus toward survival, change, development, and creativity. It is not enough that All That Is, as a primary consciousness gestalt, desires further being, but that each portion of It also carries this determination.

The Sethian ontological definition of reality is that there are two highly dynamic and expanding elements that are actually two sides of one coin: ‘consciousness’ and ‘creativity’. Both are the expression of an underlying and all permeating, emanative drive towards ever further creation into varying dimensions and ever more refined levels of consciousness, amounting to myriads of imaginary worlds. In Roberts’ words the creative emanation from All That Is implies a “frame of reality” which by far exceeds “the physical system we know”, even including all its re-incarnational developments.

The repetitive, emanative drive towards ever new creations and entities of consciousness goes along with the tendency of units of consciousness to connect with other units. A modest example of such spiritual networking is the soul pictured as a multidimensional cooperation of several ‘selves’ (3.1.c). This spiritual leaning towards ever higher developed webs and more evolved (super-)entities of consciousness finally seems to approximate All That Is, though not in a movement of return but rather in “an infinite process of creative expansion”.

Invariably, the high ideal is only more and further interconnection, leading to ever higher evolved compounds of consciousness, formed by networking entities of consciousness, creating ever more refined “imaginary worlds”, in dimensions that are beyond the physical world we know.

I conclude that the energetic nature of reality, according to Roberts/Seth, can

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37 SM, 240.
39 SM, 240.
40 SM, 244. Roberts refers to “many sessions dealing with the nature of other realities and sessions on cosmology that can’t be included in this book because of the space requirements”. One is inadvertently reminded of Roberts’ early authorship of science fiction, see also SS, 228: “The dimensions of actuality possible to All That Is, of course, far exceed those presently available to you. … The one All That Is is aware not only of its own nature and of the nature of all consciousness, but is also aware of its infinite probable selves”. Not entirely unaware of the speculative character, Seth winds up his expositions saying that “we go here toward subjects in which words become meaningless”.
41 See Hanegraaff, o.c., 123f., observing profound ambiguity between the yearning back of all individual entities of consciousness towards All That, on the one hand, over against the explicit desire, also expressed by Seth, not to disappear as individual person, nor to let the integrity of your being be destroyed (see nt. 29).
42 Chapter 16 “Probable Systems, Men, and God” (SS, 225ff.) is about potential or probable selves, earths, gods, etc. Seth observes that “in a manner of speaking, your slightest thought gives birth to worlds. … It should arouse within you the strongest feeling of creativity and speculation. It is impossible for any being to be sterile, for any idea to die, or any ability to go unfulfilled” (SS, 227). Again, the
be identified as *creative consciousness*, which is ontologically bridging the divine-human relationship.

### 3.1.e. Divine-human relationship

According to Seth, “there is no personal God-individual in Christian terms”, just as there is “no white-haired kind old father-God” to pray to.\(^{43}\) Instead, there is the ever expanding energy or All That Is “that forms everything that is and of which each human being is a part”. Trying to bridge the gap with more traditional belief, he goes on to say:

This psychic gestalt may sound impersonal to you, but since its energy forms your person, how can this be? If you prefer to call this supreme psychic gestalt God, then you must not attempt to objectify him, for he is the nuclei of your cells and more intimate than your breath. (...) You are co-creators. What you call God is the sum of all consciousness, and yet the whole is more than the sum of its parts. God is more than the sum of all personalities, and yet all personalities are what He is. There is constant creation. There is within you a force that knew how to grow you from a foetus to a grown adult. This force is part of the innate knowledge within all consciousness, and it is a part of the God within you.\(^{44}\)

Clearly, the idea of a personal and extra mundane creator God, standing over against his creation as in Christian theism, is abandoned. The deity is not pictured as a person but instead in terms of an enchanting principle. The way the divine-human relationship is envisioned fluctuates between pantheism (all is God) and pan-en-theism (all exists in God/God is in all). The former is suggested when God is presented as “the sum of all consciousness” and all personalities are said to be “what he is”, similar to the presentation of each self as a portion or “part of All That Is”\(^{45}\).\(^{46}\) In fact, the descriptive element in the notion ‘All That Is’, as such, is literally suggestive of pantheism.

In a strict sense, however, sheer pantheism can only be maintained in connection with exclusive monism but it immediately moves towards pan-en-theism when even a shred of ontological distinction or duality is accepted. This is the case when God is described as “the nuclei of your cells, and more intimate than your breath”; when God is said to be “more” than the sum of all personalities; when All That Is is a “force” within your knowledge or when there is talk of the “God within you” enabling humans to become “co-creators” with God. All these designations involve at least some dualism between God/All That Is and the “you” that is addressed. They suggest that God or All That Is is seen as the “ontologically privileged centre”. As a result, the perspective of sheer pantheism transforms into pan-en-theism in which divine-human intimacy and some measure of ‘otherness’ are combined.

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\(^{43}\) SM, 245f.

\(^{44}\) SM, 246.

\(^{45}\) See above, 3.1.d: the cadre quotation from SM, 240; also the quotation about the unimaginable and universe-forming energy of All That Is. Mind also the pantheistic allusion to Providence in nt. 35 (Seth: the great energy of All That Is, is “indeed aware of each sparrow that falls, for it is each sparrow that falls” (SM, 237f)).

\(^{46}\) See also SM, 245: “You as a consciousness, seek to know yourself and become aware of your self as a distinct individual portion of *All That Is*”. 
3.2. Hamartiology

Traditionally, the question of what is seen as ‘impedimental’ to the full development of human beings is closely connected to the problem of evil, often divided in natural, moral, and religious evil (or sin). With this in mind, it is a startling observation made by Seth that

the experiment that would transform your world would operate upon the basic idea that you create your own reality according to the nature of your beliefs, and that all existence was blessed, and that evil did not exist in it. If these ideas were followed individually and collectively, then the evidence of your physical senses would find no contradiction. They would perceive the world and existence as good.\textsuperscript{47}

We are faced here with the second ontological priority, namely of good over evil (3.1.a). According to Seth, there is nothing wrong with the world as it is or with human existence as such, but the problem lies in what we believe about it and how we perceive the world. Obviously, the second priority immediately carries us back to the nature of reality and the fundamental priority of the mind. Therefore, in the first part of this section, I will describe what, according to the Seth books, is the role and status of our beliefs and perceptions with respect to the realities we use to call evil, natural and moral (3.2.1 Beliefs, perceptions and evil). In the second part, I will recount how these insights work out with respect to the religious variety of evil and the Christian doctrine of sin (3.2.2 Religious evil or sin).

3.2.1 Beliefs, perceptions and evil

The priority of the mind implies that our beliefs and perceptions have a major role in what we see as real and think as true. They can be highly creative, and also entirely erroneous. In the latter case they lead to a. Spiritual ignorance and illusions, to which I will turn firstly. Secondly, I will illustrate this with b. The examples of natural and moral evil.

A. Spiritual ignorance and illusions

The saying that sin lies ‘at the root of all questions’, central in some traditional forms of Reformed Protestant spirituality, is utterly foreign to the Seth books. But if we remove ‘sin’ and substitute it with ignorance or limitation, we come close to the analysis that Roberts received from her higher spokesman, who revealed that

… it is important that you realize that spiritual ignorance is at the basis of so many of your problems, and that indeed your only limitations are spiritual ones\textsuperscript{48}.

As usual, Seth is addressing his audience in the regular, day-to-day capacity of the outer ego which he considers to be our most limited form of consciousness. Still, the ontological maxim that we create our own reality, according to our own ideas and perceptions, is taken as valid in all forms of consciousness. Thus, the ‘realities’ that are created at the most limited level of the outer ego are also true but only at that particular level. If these limited realities are seen from the much more observing perspective

\textsuperscript{47} SS, 163.
\textsuperscript{48} SS, 334.
of the *inner* self, they appear as *illusions*. This means that designating a perception (or its content) as an illusion is not necessarily a full ontological disqualification, as the illusion “has a purpose and a meaning”. It can be useful within the more limited context in which it occurs.\(^49\) A very general specimen of ego-illusions is the belief in opposites. According to Seth, “opposites have validity only in your own system of reality”. They belong to the “root assumptions” of the daily-physical existence of humans, although from a higher perspective these opposites represent “deep unities” and larger “wholes” still unknown to the limited ego.\(^50\) Thus, in outer ego awareness, we perceive reality as divided into up or down, light or dark, God against the devil, etc. Admittedly, there is some limited sense in such ego-perceptions, even if they concern ideas about good and evil.\(^51\) Yet, a strong or even “obsessional belief” in such opposites endorsed by the ego is “highly detrimental” because from a broader point of view “evil is simply ignorance”.\(^52\) This is valid for both natural and moral evil.

### 3.2.1.b. The examples of natural and moral evil

With respect to natural evil, Seth states that natural disaster can be considered negatively as evil only as long as you focus on the “elements that to you appear destructive”. But he holds that if you look from a little higher perspective, the “explosive energy” of a devastating storm can be “highly creative”. A tornado certainly leads to a “change of form” but this is not the same as destruction.\(^53\) One could say that the force of nature creates space for new opportunities. Violence of nature can even be used, according to Seth, by the inner or higher self in order to proceed from its present physical existence towards other “spheres of activity”.\(^54\) Thus, what appears to be an incident of evil in the perception of the outer ego may genuinely be a deliberate and creative step forward initiated by one’s inner self. The initial perception by the ego of something ‘evil’ is then actually a limited one and therefore an illusion.

A similar reasoning is followed regarding supposed moral evil. The perception of murder as being a moral crime is based on the presupposed opposition of ‘life versus death’ and the corresponding belief that the victim is killed forever. But both the opposition and the belief are illusions: limited perceptions that are only valid in the experience of outer existence. In a broader sense, death “does not exist”

\(^{49}\) *SS*, 39: Remember also that if physical reality is in a larger sense an illusion, it is an illusion caused by a greater reality. The illusion itself has a purpose and a meaning.

\(^{50}\) *SS*, 161, 342v.

\(^{51}\) *SS*, 161; *SS*, 343: “In your terms, the ideas of good and evil help you recognize the sacredness of existence, the responsibility of consciousness. The ideas of opposites also are necessary guide lines for the developing ego”. Still, as Seth goes on: “The inner self knows quite well the unity that exists”.

\(^{52}\) *SS*, 161f.

\(^{53}\) *SS*, 175; *SM*, 282. Destruction is merely the changing of form. A cloudburst or a tornado knows nothing of destruction.

\(^{54}\) *SS*, 423v. This is illustrated with the example of an earthquake casualty in Los Angeles (1971). Seemingly without a reason, a man left during the quake a safe building, only to be killed by a falling brick. According to Seth it was the “whole self” (higher self as part of the soul entity) of the man that had taken the decision. “This particular individual was quite aware of what would occur, on what you would call an unconscious basis. He was not predestined to die. He chose both the time, in your terms, and the method, for reasons of his own. … He knew that he was ready to go on to other spheres of activity”. So, the decision is localized by Roberts/Seth on the higher or more inner level of the soul-entity which is beyond the dimension of outer ego existence and consciousness. At this point many later New Age authors have advertised and generalized simplifications like ‘everyone choosing his/her own parents’ or even that developing a severe illness is ‘one’s own choice’.
but is “merely a change of form”. Murder exists and must be dealt with only in so far as you “believe that you can murder a man and end his consciousness forever”. The famous idea about turning the other cheek (Mt. 5,38) reveals, according to Seth, that “basically the attacker only attacks himself”. The adequate reaction to crime is not punishment, nor hating the hatred that led to the killing in the first place, because “he who hates an evil merely creates another one”.

Now, the apparent absence of condemnation on ethical grounds might suggest far-going moral relativism, but this is actually contrary to Seth’s intention, as he basically holds that the practice of violence is never to be justified, thus coming close to a persuasion of radical non-violence. Seth is perfectly clear that murder and homicide reveal destructive feelings and hate in the experienced reality of the perpetrator; and that crime and violence show that the doer is still far removed from “the final and last lesson learned – the positive desire for creativity and love over destruction and hatred”. But since the murderer, like anyone, creates his or her own reality, (s)he cannot be disciplined or adjusted from the outside by others. Moreover, beyond the limited perception of the ego, the evil that the ego believes in (and believingly creates) is an illusion, no matter if it is seen from the standpoint of the doer, the victim, or the observer. Evil has no metaphysical reality.

3.2.2 Religious evil or sin

We now turn to the Sethian perspective with respect to the traditional idea of religious evil which is sin. Firstly, I will attend to Seth’s criticism on what he calls original sin (a.) and look for what the core of this criticism is. I will consider what is seen in place of sin as impedimental to human existence (spiritual ignorance) and its localization in

55 SM, 247: “No God created the crime of murder, and no God created sorrow or pain”, which implies, in my opinion, that we – as perpetrator and judging observers – create both the crime and the pain ourselves through our interpretation. Thus, Seth observes that the killer of Martin Luther King may have believed to have blotted out a living consciousness for all eternity, but actually he was not, because “your errors and mistakes, luckily enough, are not real and do not affect reality, for Dr. King still lives”.

56 SS, 171; see also 178: The problem of war will … teach you that when you kill another man, basically you will end up killing yourself.

57 Seth has little confidence in the use of imprisonment, see NPR, 337: “The entire framework of a prison … is a constant reminder to the convict of his situation and reinforces his original difficulty”. According to Seth, both the detaining system and the prisoners mutually need each other “for they operate within the same system of belief. Each accepts violence as a method of behaviour and survival” (340).

58 SS, 171; also 174: “If you hate an evil, then beware of your conception of the word. Hate is restrictive. It narrows down your perception. … You will find more and more to hate and bring the hated elements into your own experience … for the emotions are the problem, and not those elements that seem to bring them about.

59 SM, 248: During a class session of ESP (in which Roberts had a channeling session with more people participating), dealing with the topic of violence, a younger attendant defended recent student riots saying: “Well, I’m against violence, too. But sometimes it’s justified”. But this ignited Seth in a passionate outburst of moral ire: “There is never any justification for violence. There is no justification for hatred. There is no justification for murder … When you curse another, you curse yourselves, and the curse returns to you. When you are violent, the violence returns … When every young man refuses to go to war, you will have peace”. Clearly, apart from a karmic tendency in these words, they also express an “unmistakable quality of moral indignation” (Hanegraaff, o.c., 283).

60 SM, 281f.

61 For a discussion of “good and evil” in the wider context of New Age religion, see Hanegraaff, o.c., 276-301, esp. 277: “On the foundational level of spiritual reality … no duality exists. Good and evil, in other words, are not metaphysical realities. They are meaningless concepts from the viewpoint of the soul”.
the outer ego. Secondly, I will discuss how the human ego is assessed in emic terms (b.). Then, I will discuss the Sethian point of view as related to the definition of sin by Plantinga in personal-relational terms. I will consider, with respect to the human part in the relationship, the element of human guilt (c.). With respect to the other part, I will consider the personification of God as the supposedly aggrieved object (d).

3.2.2.a. Criticism on (original) sin

The notion “original sin” is discussed by Seth in connection with his emphasizing the fact that we “form our own environment” which is, of course, a variation on the maxim that we create our own reality. Seth wants his students to realize that “the responsibility for your life … is your own”. The belief that your environment exists “objective and independent of yourself” is a limiting idea that only makes you feel “powerless” to change or transcend it. In this context, original sin is criticized together with two other deterministic views on human being, namely the vision on the “sub-conscious” in a psychoanalytical sense and, remarkably, the over-exaggerated belief in the influence of past life experiences. To the extent that these theories or beliefs stipulate conditions that are beyond human control, they are anathema to Seth assuring his audience that

you are not under a sentence placed upon you for original sin, by any childhood events, or by past-life experience. Your life, for example, may be far less fulfilling than you think you would prefer. You may be less when you would be more, but you are not under a pall placed upon your psyche, either by original sin, Freud’s infancy syndromes, or past-life influences.62

Seen from the ideal of ‘creating your own reality’, the essential point of resistance is the implication in all three theories that the now living person is put out of office, overruled by phenomena that are beyond his/her present potential. As regards original sin, it is obvious that the implication of a basic non posse is radically opposed to Seth’s belief in the unlimited potentials of creative consciousness. Potentials, however, are not yet actualities. Although a non posse is definitely denied, we have seen that a basic non scire - spiritual ignorance -63 was instead adopted as the root of our problems.

The gravity point of this ignorance is primarily localized in the outer ego. On the one hand, this implies that our regular, subject-object oriented awareness is by no means as conscious as often is assumed. While only keeping to itself, the ego suffers from spiritual limitation. On the other hand, this limitation is not seen as definite. Notwithstanding its narrowness, the ego remains to be considered by Seth as being fully capable of widening its perspective. It only needs to tune in to the inner self:

In normal living and in day-by-day experience, all the knowledge you need is available. You must, however, believe that it is, put yourself in a position to receive it by looking inward and remaining open to your intuitions, and most important, by desiring to receive it. (…) You do not have to die to find God. All That Is, is now, and you are a part of All That Is now … You can, now, set out to explore environments that are not physical if you want to, but I do not see any rush of students at that invisible door!64

62 SS, 58.
63 See above 3.2.a (SS, 334).
64 SS, 398; 405; see also SS, 9 (3.1.b).
Clearly, we meet here with the second of the two ‘indicators’ or fundamentals of Platonic-esoteric spirituality: the enthusiastic belief in the possibility and pursuit of direct gnosis (2.1.2.c.ii). As Roberts had experienced in her initial “trip without drugs”, the regular blind between the outer ego and the much wider consciousness of the inner self, between the physical world and the infinite dimensions of inner reality, is actually “tissue-paper thin”65. At any moment you can mentally or spiritually explore environments that transcend the limitation of the physical realm of objective consciousness: that is, if you want to. But as Seth has to admit with a hint of fatigue, no one seems to be in hurry to go through that invisible door!66 Why is that so? The problem that announces itself here is fully commensurable with the question that underlies the doctrine of sin. Why don’t people do what will lead to their genuine good? In terms of the Sethian perspective: what is the matter with us as outer ego?

3.2.2.b. EMIC ASSESSMENT OF THE EGO

According to Roberts/Seth the outer ego originally proceeded from the inner self as a “step [by man] out of himself”, leaving his/her former holistic framework into a new, namely subject-object oriented consciousness. In order to become actual, the new kind of consciousness presupposed “a giant separation” from the spontaneous harmony and peace that was abandoned, while offering “a new creativity, in his terms”67. In order to defend these “terms” and maintain his (its) own independence, man or the ego tends to behave like a “jealous god”: forcedly taking distance from its original inner self, frightened to dissolve back in it. Like a “tyrant”, the ego anxiously tries to confine you to the outer world in which it feels comfortable.68 As outer egos, we clamp to clear and contrasting opposites offered by the outer senses, declining the intuitive signals from the inner self. We ignore the myriad varieties of spiritual reality and possible inner worlds. Thus, the outer ego existence is pictured by Seth as proceeding from a higher spiritual realm through separation and, once realized, as being anxiously self-possessed, thus limiting itself to unnecessary spiritual ignorance. Given the availability of inner knowledge and the ego’s denial to embrace it, the question of responsibility and guilt cannot be avoided.

3.2.2.c. GUILT AND THE HUMAN PART OF THE RELIGIOUS RELATIONSHIP

With respect to ‘guilt’, it is acceded by Seth that “strong elements of your civilization are built upon ideas of guilt and punishment”. They are intended as means for “inner discipline” and maintaining civil order but they often achieve the opposite

65 See the Introduction to this paragraph, nt. 5 (SM,10).
66 SS, 405; some lines further, at the end of a class session, Seth is almost ‘evangelizing’ his students, urging them to restudy his lecture: “try to sense that lapse in the pulsation of your consciousness. Try to leap that gap!”
67 SS, 338; see also NPR, 230ff., where the origin of the outer ego consciousness is drawn loosely in terms of the biblical myth of the first sin, the Fall from the state of justitia originalis. According to Seth, the tale of original sin “represents the emergence of the conscious mind of the strongly oriented individual self from that ground of being from which all consciousness comes”. In order to reach this new consciousness in which the subject-object separation is realized, the human being “quite purposefully detached himself … from the body of his planet in a new way”. It meant that the “primeval knowing unknowingness … had to be abandoned, in which all things were given – no judgments or distinctions were necessary, and all responsibilities were biologically foreordained” (230).
68 SS, 12; also 340: “The ego, having its birth from within must therefore always boast of its independence while maintaining the nagging certainty of its inner origin".
result. The real trouble, however, is not guilt but the belief in guilt and the misuse that is made of it. As the discussion of moral evil shows, guilt between humans is an illusion (3.2.1.b). This is confirmed in the distinction, made by Seth, between “natural guilt” and “unnatural guilt”. The former belongs to life as inevitably as the predator’s killing of its prey, the latter is self-imposed. Berating yourself of something you did yesterday or ten years ago is “most likely” your own creation of “artificial guilt”. Seth maintains that, even in case of a violation, “natural guilt does not involve penance. It is meant as a precautionary measure, a reminder .... Do not do this again, is the only afterward message”. Apparently, Seth is convinced that “violation” of rules and of other creatures is an inevitable part of outer existence and the subsequent natural (!) guilt harbours no moral problem. Thus, it seems that guilt is actually denied altogether. If designated as “natural”, it is not guilt, whereas “unnatural guilt” is a self-imposed illusion. The question is how this works out with respect to guilt in the religious sense? I will discuss this question as it relates to Plantinga’s formulation of sin as culpable and personal affront to a personal God (1.1.2). The first three terms in this form describe the human part in the religious relationship. I will comment on them as they relate to the Sethian viewpoint.

The element of culpability, which is central in the Christian view on sin, is fully absent in Seth’s presentation, not only of outer ego and inner self, but of the human-di- vine relationship altogether. The main impediment to connecting with the inner realm is the ego’s “spiritual ignorance”, which is not an intentional, positive activity but rather a privation, a lack of consciousness. On that basis there can be no question of a conscious and deliberate action that is a precondition to a responsible and then culpable affront. Thus, with respect to the human side of the relationship, guilt is not an adequate idea.

Sin is further presented by Plantinga as something personal on our part. This means that the whole person is considered to be involved in sinful being and doing, consciously and wilfully. In the Sethian presentation, however, the spiritual impediment of ignorance does not concern the whole person. Instead, it is restricted largely to the outer ego, whose spiritual limitation does not blemish our true identity of inner self or soul. The implication is that only a limited part or fragment of our personality, the ego, is involved in what we do.

Moreover, the idea of sin as a deliberate affront goes counter to the ontological priority of good and the illusory character of evil, as it has been assumed by Seth. Basically, according to him, there is only ‘good’ – being tantamount to the emanative energy of All That Is. This ‘good’ is executing or emanating itself as creative consciousness of which each human self or ego is a part or has its share. Sinful affront then would imply opposition of one entity of creative consciousness against another, coming down to opposition of one entity of ‘good’ against another, which makes for an improbable conception to be further discussed later in Part Four (§10,1). The impedimental element within the Sethian system is not that the lesser entity (ego) is indulging in consciously affronting the higher entity to which it belongs, but rather that the former keeps itself separated from the latter and does not desire to invite it

69 NPR, 57f; Seth observes that the world “is running quite wild now – not despite your ideas of guilt and punishment, but largely because of them”.
70 NPR, 139f; 140.
71 NPR, 152.
But, as soon as connection is made between the outer and inner self, or between whatever fragments or entities of consciousness, the sparks of their encounter bring only light, adding undreamt of consciousness, creativity and realities.

With respect to the human part in the religious relationship, we can conclude that the more the ego-consciousness is diagnosed as creatively and spiritually limited and ignorant, the less relevant it becomes to speak of its sinful culpability. And since the ego is but a limited fragment of who we are, we are only partially involved and not personally in the broadest sense of our prime identity. Moreover, the ego’s ignorance does by no means limit the clairvoyance and inner knowledge of the higher self or soul. Actually, these data concerning the human part, already imply the denial, not only of any real, significant impedimental aspect to becoming fully human; but they also negate the reality of actual sin. This is also in line with the implicit denial of moral evil discussed above (3.2.1, b). However, all this primarily concerns the human part, whereas, Plantinga’s formulation of the doctrine explicitly mentions a second, namely the divine part. This brings us to the religious or theological core of sin which concerns our relationship to the divine.72

3.2.2.d. The personal God as the aggrieved object

The theological essence of sin depends upon the supposedly aggrieved object of sin: the personal God. In the section on cosmology (3.1.e), we saw that the Sethian version of deity must not be objectified or personified in theistic terms. All That Is is not envisioned as a person-like creator but rather as a non-personal principle or energy (“Primary Energy Gestalt”), pouring itself out in ever further fragments of creative consciousness and thus emanating into the ever-growing web of spiritual reality. Contrary to the image of an extramundane Creator standing as a highest Person over against his creation, All That Is is immanent in all reality and especially in humans, according to a pan-en-theistic cosmology.73 When the deity is envisioned as an all permeating principle instead of an extramundane, divine person, it seems all the more obvious that ‘actual sin’ – in the sense of deliberately affronting or acting personally against this other Person God – appears as inconceivable.

Clearly, these remarks do concern primarily what in traditional Christian teaching is regarded as actual sin taking place in actual existence. What remains is the core element of the human predicament, as envisioned in the concept of original sin, namely the element of non posse. Ignorance is not the entire answer to the question of the ego’s limitation. Within the Sethian belief system, we can still ask why it is, on the level of outer ego existence, that we leave unused the abundant potential of inner knowledge that is supposed to be so directly at hand. In order to address this question, we must look once more, and more explicitly, to: what is seen as our human potential? And where is it localised?

72 Sin is not primarily an ethical or moral but a theological concept, a theological interpretation of the relationship to the divine, see e.g., G. van den Brink & C. van der Kooi, Christelijke Dogmatiek, Boekencentrum: Zoetermeer 2012, 275: “Zonde is in de theologie in de eerste plaats een theologisch en niet een moreel begrip”.

73 See my remarks on pantheism/pan-en-theism above, 3.1.e.
3.3. Human Potential

So far, it appeared that Roberts/Seth consider ideas of evil as illusions that only seem to be real to the limited perception of narrow ego awareness. This also concerns religious evil or sin. Ideas and beliefs about sin or guilt were marked as “limiting concepts”. They limit the free development of your inner possibilities. Moreover, far from living under a determining spell of religious, psychological or re-incarnational evil, people according to Seth are born into a natural “state of grace”.

3.3.a. Natural Grace and the Inner Self

The natural predicament into which we are born is tantamount to a situation of spontaneous growth and development: a “transparent, joyful acquiescence that is a ground requirement of all existence”. This state of grace, which is deemed independent of any ecclesiastical mediation, has a permanent character. As Seth notes,

It is impossible for you to leave it. You will die in a state of grace whether or not special words are spoken for you, or water or oil is poured upon your head. You share this blessing with the animals and all other living things. You cannot “fall out of” grace, nor can it be taken from you. You can ignore it. You can hold beliefs that blind you to its existence. You will still be graced but unable to perceive your own uniqueness and integrity, and blind also to other attributes with which you are automatically gifted.74

As usual, Seth is addressing his audience according to their physical being, in the limited capacity of their outer ego consciousness. This identification as outer egos, however, is a limitation of who and what we really are. We share genuinely and essentially with all living creatures a state of grace that has an indelible character. With respect to ourselves as humans, this is another way of saying that our deepest and genuine identity is localized in the spiritual realm.75 More specifically, our identity lies in the inner self and it’s taking part in the larger group entity of the soul. Seen from the standpoint of the ego, the inner self as its immediate origin and true being is also its potential. In this sense it was stated above that the inner self and soul are “man’s mediator with All That Is” (3.1.c). Inner self and soul form the human, or rather the outer ego’s gateway to the divine and to the unlimited creative consciousness of All That Is. The pursuit of direct gnosis is possible through a direct, inner connection with the divine. As outer ego, you only need to look inside “to utilize those abilities that are your heritage”.76

3.3.b. The Riddle Unsolved

The riddle why humans in many cases keep to the ignorance and limitation of their outer ego consciousness, has been hinted at but is by no means solved. The ego’s defences remain quite incomprehensible: why would I behave so unwillingly and self-imposed as ego? Why do I act like a “jealous god”? Even then, the latter wording still suggests that I am a ‘god’. And as soon as I open up towards my inner realm, I start to become a ‘willing god’: an “incipient god”, which actually is Seth’s

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74 NPR, 150.
75 SS, 15, where Seth reminds his audience “that your own basic identity is as nonphysical as my own”.
76 SS, 425; Actually, Seth’s entire manifestation appears as a mission to awaken and stimulate people in this direction; see also SS, 23, 405.
To become and be consciously a ‘beginning god’ and then to further develop, creatively and consciously is the main core of human potential, according to the message in the Seth books. Like a kernel it may lay separated in dry soil for one lifetime or many. But sooner or later, it will be moistened and fertilized by inner wisdom and flourish unfailingly.

3.4. Inventory of findings

In this section I will collect the findings with respect to the eight entries formulated in the ‘Agenda for research’ (2.1.3) inserting them into the Inventory Table included in § 6. Firstly, I will gather the results on the four theological questions (3.4.1), concerning (1) Divine-human unity or closeness? (2) Denial of original sin?, especially of the element of non posse; (3) Denial of all evil? (4) Denial of actual sin? As all these questions have been discussed and answered already, I will do little more than refer to the concerning sections. In principle following the emic claim, I will force the results into a simple yes (+), no (−), or undecided (±). Thus, I will make the results operational for discussion and evaluation in the intermediate paragraph (§ 6 Taking Stock) and finally in Part Four (§ 10). In case the emic claim provokes an obvious reply of etic criticism, this will be added in brackets.

Secondly (3.4.2), and in a similar procedure, I will review the former sections in regard of the esoteric characteristics as developed by the anti-apologetic criticism (see 2.1.2.c.ii). The four benchmarks (see 2.1.3) are: (a) Affirming co-eternity; (b) Affirming direct gnosis; (c) Denial or dissolution of the individual soul; and (d) Denial of a personal, trans-mundane God. With respect to each benchmark, I will determine whether it applies to the teaching by Roberts=Seth, again translating the results into yes (+), no (−), or undecided (±) as done with the theological questions. The Inventory Table with the outcomes of the New Age sources is shown in § 6 and, including those of the theologians, again in § 9.

3.4.1 Four questions

(1) Divine-human unity? (+)

In the Sethian cosmogony of emanation, the understanding of the divine-human relationship alternates between pantheism and pan-en-theism. The former seems to be intended when the priority of mind (3.1.a) is emphasized, and when the creative consciousness which is the divine-human common thing (3.1.d) is combined with the merely secondary status of outer, physical reality. But it cannot be denied that outer reality, and the outer ego-person are granted some limited use, and thus never unequivocally denied. Therefore, it is more adequate to state that, despite a pantheistic leaning or teleology, the actual divine-human relationship, is basically envisioned in a pan-en-theistic frame (3.1.e). ‘All That Is’ is present in human beings and this divine presence is identified as the human inner self. Apart from this ontological divine-human unity there is some dualism as well, which, however, is not localized between the human inner self and God (or All That Is) but between the (divine) inner self and the outer ego (3.1.b). The outer ego, however, is not considered as the real ‘me’.

77 SS, 72f: “In many ways the soul is an incipient god”. I further note that the likening to god includes a revealing activity that is attributed to the soul, as Seth goes on stating that “the entity or soul, the larger self … whispers even now in the hidden recesses of each reader’s experience”.

78 Both divine-human identity (with the inner self) and duality (as regards the ego) is involved when Seth
Therefore, the answer to the question whether divine-human unity is affirmed must be positive.

(2) Denial of original sin, especially the element of non posse? (+)

The real me, that is, my higher or inner self is naturally clairvoyant (3.1.b). Original sin is denied as a sentence being passed on you (3.2.2.a). The idea of a basic non posse is opposed to the divine principle of creative consciousness in humans. The essence of original sin (non posse) is, as it were, turned upside down into the high potential of the human mind designated as 'creating your own reality’. The question whether original sin is denied must clearly be answered with yes.

(3) Denial of all evil? (+)

Evil, either moral or natural, is not acknowledged as something real in the perspective of Roberts/Seth. Although certain experiences may strike the outer ego as evil, this has no reality to the higher self. One can say that the more an evil is physical and situated in time and space, the more it is considered illusory from the broader and spiritual point of view of the higher self. This means that in Roberts’ perspective evil has no (metaphysical) reality, there is nothing evil to the genuinely spiritual, inner self (3.2.1.b). Now, one could say that ignorance is an evil, or at least impedimental aspect but this, too, only concerns the ego; and only as long as the ego shuts itself off from the clairvoyant wisdom of the much more observing inner self. But seen from the standpoint of this inner self which is my real identity, any presumed evil or impedimental aspect of outer life is only a temporary learning facility. Apart from that, it has no lasting reality. For the real self, the soul, and All That Is, there is no genuine negativity or lasting impediment to creative self-realisation whatsoever.

(4) Denial of actual sin? (+)

Guilt on the human part is not an adequate idea (3.2.2.c), while the divine part, ‘god’, is part of our selves. By consequence, ‘actual sin’, in the traditional meaning of acting against an opposing God-individual appears as inconceivable (3.2.2.d).

3.4.2 Four anti-apologetic benchmarks

The four anti-apologetic benchmarks, namely the two essentials of esotericism and the two consequential characteristics (see 2.1.2.c.ii), have bearing on original sin (a, b) and actual sin (c, d). With respect to each benchmark, I will start with briefly defining its polemic impetus according to the anti-apologetic argument, and then carry out the assessment.

(a) Divine-human co-eternity? (+)

The meaning of co-eternity is best understood through its opposite, ‘creation from nothing’. The latter formula served first of all the refutation of dualistic cosmologies in which creation was seen as depending on two original sources, which might be understood as polar opposites or as qualitatively different principles. By contrast, traditional Christianity professed only one divine Creator, God, who is in no way de-
pendent on any other reality such as a second god or source to create. According to Thomasius, the formula underpins the essential qualitative distinction between God and the world, between the Creator and creation (2.1.2.c.ii). With regard to the divine-human relationship, creation from nothing implies that God and the human soul are not of the same ontological kind or standing. The soul did not pour forth from God, nor did it exist separately. Instead, it was created by God from nothing, that is, without any other help or contribution from what- or whomsoever. Co-eternity, by contrast, either suggests that there is a second principle of the same ontological standing, as in severely dualistic systems; or it implies that the divine-human relationship is envisioned as near and intimate, based on the assumption that both partners in this bond are ontologically congenial, and originally of one kind, as in emanative systems.

Taken in the latter sense as ontological unity, divine-human co-eternity is an essential element of the worldview advocated by Roberts/Seth. Far from being created ex nihilo by an external creator God, the entire (spiritual) world, according to Seth, has come into being through emanation from the original generative source All That Is (3.1.d). Divine-human co-eternity, that is, God-human congeniality and spiritual identity are ontologically materialized in a common ‘thing’. This continuity or common quality is manifesting itself repetitively in the entire emanated reality as ‘creative consciousness’ which is the dynamic energy of All That Is. Consequently, the divine-human relationship is seen as one of identity of being, suggesting intimate closeness and essential unity between the human and the divine. There is no ontological-qualitative distinction between the essential human self or soul and the divine. Both are larger or smaller entities (or network of entities) of creative consciousness.

(b) Pursuit of direct gnosis? (+)

The divine-human co-eternity, and even identity of being implied in the symbol of emanation is the ontological basis of the esoteric spirituality of enthusiasm, the belief in the possibility of direct, inner gnosis. Unlike knowledge that is acquired through religious (biblical) revelation, and also different from scientific knowledge attained by empirical observation and rational deduction, direct gnosis is unmediated knowledge based on the assumed possibility of direct access to the ultimate or divine ground of reality (2.1.2.c.i).

The Seth-books are presented by Roberts as offering the proceeded fruits of intensive channelling. This means that the Sethian system is not only disseminating the possibility of direct gnosis, but the entire system is actually said to have been generated from it. In the emic perspective, the higher self is the “inner perceiver” of spiritual reality. With this perceiver (or as such perceivers) humans are said to be naturally

79 According to Van den Brink & Van der Kooi, Christelijke Dogmatiek, 199, currents of gnostic dualism as advocated by Marcion in the first half of the second century formed the primary background that evoked Creatio ex nihilo as the orthodox counter voice, to emphasize especially the element of independence of the Creator (199). In this way, a clear distinction between the Creator and creation could be combined with a positive valuation of creation, including earthly matter. According to the authors, depreciation of matter is not originally biblical. Referring to Gen.1,31 they instead re-emphasize the Christian doctrine as non-dualistic and life-affirming (200).

80 Clearly, being of one kind and the implications of closeness and congeniality are not valid with respect to severely dualistic cosmologies, in which the assumed co-eternity of two original principles or sources rather seems to accentuate and aggravate the mutual antagonism into an eternal qualitative conflict.
“clairvoyant and telepathic”. Compared to our ordinary subject-object consciousness, the higher self is accredited with an awareness of much wider scope: a highly imaginative ability, entirely fit to communicate (with) spiritual realities that lie far beyond the three-dimensional (3.1.b).

(c) The denial or dissolution of the individual soul? (+)

According to Thomasius the “immortality of the individual soul” becomes devoid of meaning, especially in emanative and mystical traditions through their adoption of the soul’s return into the divine. Rather than immortality, the loss of meaning primarily concerns individuality. The point of debate is: are we forever identifiable as an individual entity or not? According to the anti-apologetic criticism, the answer can only be ‘no’ when the soul is pictured as a droplet flowing back into the divine ocean again.

What exactly the human being or the human person is according to the Sethian anthropology is impossible to pinpoint. Mostly we are addressed as outer egos whose main fault, however, is precisely the attempt to maintain ourselves as separated individuals. As such, we erroneously distance our ego-self not only from other selves, but primarily from our own true inner self (3.1.b). Even then, the ideal of having and even maintaining a ‘distinct identity’ is not abandoned, since it is emphasized by Seth that “no individuality is ever lost”; that every individual consciousness maintains its own “I am-ness”. At the same time, however, it is stressed that our true identity (localized in the inner self or soul) is basically open-ended: there are “no limitations to your entity”, and your soul has no boundaries for “boundaries would enclose it and deny it freedom”. As inner self, or together with some other selves in the soul-network, our genuine identity is provisional and always in the process of further development and affiliation with other consciousness (3.1.c). The idea of disappearing into a greater whole - like a small fish becoming part of a bigger one when eaten – is not very appealing to Roberts. Even then, much more substantial and serious seems to be her conviction (and that of Seth) that no individuality or entity of consciousness shall ever be pinned down to what it once was or presently is: “you are not bound to any category or corner of existence. Your reality cannot be measured …”. Clearly, Roberts hesitated to give up the notion of individuality. But much stronger was her craving for unlimited freedom. Therefore, she refuted the idea of an eternally unchanging soul, and was prepared, apparently, to let the idea of a remaining, identifiable, individual person become highly elusive. I conclude that in her perspective the individual human soul as a continuous identity is strongly relativized, and actually dissolved or denied.

(d) The denial of a personal trans-mundane Creator God? (+)

Another heresy Thomasius perceived as concomitant with ignoring Creatio ex nihilo, is the denial of the personal, trans-mundane Creator God. That the biblical Creator is trans-mundane signifies according to Thomasius that he is distinguished from the blind causality of material principles. As the autonomous Creator he does

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81 3.1.c., SS, 72; 83: your soul or prime identity is “in itself a gestalt of many other individual conscious-nesses.”

82 SS, 355; see also SS, 72.
neither concur nor compete with any such innate worldly principles. The perspective of a Creator further implies that God is seen as an intelligent craftsman, a mindful Person with actual awareness of the reality of his creation. Being such a conscious and person-like Creator, and thus not a principle, he can react to actual reality both freely and with intelligible purposiveness, which is essentially different from the blind automatism of inner principles.

In Roberts’ theology there is clearly no place for what she called a “personal God-individual in Christian terms”, there is no father-God to pray to. According to Seth what we call God is not a person but the “sum of all consciousness”, designated as All That Is. All That Is or God is further described as the divine element within humans that is not only conscious but also creative. Moreover, this conscious-creative element or principle is said to be “part of the innate knowledge within all consciousness”. As such it is identified as “a part of God within you” (3.1.e). I have designated this divine element that is a common principle or ‘thing’ immanent in all human reality, as creative consciousness. Notwithstanding some pantheistic tones, the divine-human relationship is basically envisioned in a pan-en-theistic frame. All That Is/God is not a person but an energetic principle of creative consciousness. It/He is not trans-mundane but most vibrantly present in humans, namely as their inner or higher self.

I conclude that according Roberts/Seth my four initial questions (1-4), as well as the four benchmarks derived from the anti-apologetic criticism (a-d), can all be answered with a clear affirmative yes. Therefore, only plusses will be entered in the inventory table (see § 6). Especially the affirmation of co-eternity (a) and direct gnosis (b) show clearly the parallels between Western esotericism and New Age religion, at least in its representation by the spiritual entity Seth, as mediated by its earthly channel Jane Roberts.

83 Lehmann-Brauns, Weisheit, 43.
§ 4. A Course in Miracles

“There must be another way!” A Course in Miracles (ACiM / the Course) can be regarded as the response to this question of Bill Thetford (1923-1988) to his colleague Helen Schucman (1909-1981). Both had been working together at the Psychiatry Department of Columbia University of New York since 1958: Thetford as Associate Professor and Director (of the Psychology Department of Presbyterian Hospital), Schucman as clinical research psychologist. Having to deal with faculty problems and reorganization, they were faced with a lot of tension and recriminations, including from each other. In the summer of 1965, while both were trying to bring about a shift in the discordant atmosphere, Schucman began to experience a change in her “mental pictures”, which she had had since she was a little girl. She now experienced a series of often recurring dreams at night or while being awake, one of which was about an unrecognized female figure. As Schucman later recounted, this figure was heavily draped and kneeling with bowed head, heavy chains twisted around her wrists and ankles. Next to her a fire rose high above her head, coming from a large metal brazier … She seemed to be some sort of priestess … [in] an ancient religious rite. This figure recurred almost daily for several weeks, though each time with noticeable changes. The chains began to drop away and she began to raise her head. Very slowly she finally stood up … When the priestess figure first raised her eyes and looked at me, I was terribly afraid. I was sure her expression would be full of anger and her eyes filled with condemnation and disdain. I kept my head turned away the next few times she appeared, but finally I made up my mind to look straight at her face. When I did, I burst into tears …

Instead of glaring with disapproval and denunciation, the priestess’s face appeared to be gentle and full of compassion and her eyes entirely innocent:

… She had never seen what I was afraid she would find in me. She knew of nothing that warranted condemnation. I loved her so much that I literally fell on my knees in front of her.

Though unsuccessfully trying to unite with the priestly figure, Schucman was overwhelmed with tremendous joy and relief. In her dreams she asked loudly: “does this mean I can have my function back?”, receiving a silent but perfectly clear and definite answer: “of course!” It filled her again with wonder and exhilarating happiness and left her with the “strangely split awareness” that there was “a part” of her she did not know, but “which understood exactly what all this really meant”. As we will see later, the idea that all fears of guilt and unworthiness turn out to be totally illusory and mistaken returns as a major perspective in A Course in Miracles, which some months later started to be channeled down.

In October 1965, Schucman clearly heard an inner voice telling her: “This is a course in

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1 A Course in Miracles will be indicated or abbreviated below as: ‘the Course’ or as ACiM.
2 Skutch, Journey without distance, 34.
3 Skutch, o.c., 35, 36.
4 Skutch, o.c., 36; also Wapnick, Absence from Felicity, 0
miracles. Please take notes” (54). She did not like it at all, panicked and telephoned Bill Thetford for deliberation and support. In the years to come, Schucman would never completely let go of her basic resistance against being a channel and taking notes (69). Although she did consider the voice behind the accumulating material as “unusually authoritative”, it simultaneously remained a "source … she did not intellectually believe in” (57). Nevertheless, the voice kept reporting itself, mostly in the evenings, and the transmission of the material would extend over seven and a half years. Schucman made shorthand notes, reading it out the following morning to Thetman, who typed it down. In this way the genesis of A Course in Miracles took place. First came the Textbook, exhibiting its theo-philosophical and doctrinal perspectives, during the years 1965 till 1968, counting over 600 pages. Then, after a pause of some months, the voice announced itself again to dictate the Workbook for Students, from 1969 till 1971, resulting in 365 lessons over 470 pages. Finally, during several months in 1972 the Manual for Teachers (70 pages) and in 1975 a short Clarification of Terms (15 pages) came through.

From an emic perspective, the teacher or (inner) Voice behind all the learning and lecturing belongs to a divine speaker, either Jesus, Spirit or God. This is all the more remarkable as Schucman, who had herself chosen to be baptized during her teens, had since then become a professed atheist. Nolens volens, she gave her cooperation, resenting having her evenings be impinged upon and never entirely prepared to let go of her resistance against being a channel for the Voice. Yet, despite all her ambivalence and skepticism and never becoming much of a pupil herself, she nevertheless was meticulous careful in reproducing the words without alteration or adjustment, as if all the teachings and lessons came by a sort of verbal inspiration. Another curiosity is that only half way into the process did they come to realize that much of the material had been written in blank verse – iambic pentameter, Shakespearean style. When most of ACiM was collected and typed down, Schucman and Thetford remained deep-
ly uncertain about how to proceed. Anxious to keep their psychic practice hidden from their colleagues at the medical faculty, they had shown the material to only a very few people. Two other persons would still have to enter the stage to advance the project to its final coming out.

At the end of 1972 the original pair became acquainted with Kenneth Wapnick (1942-2013). Jewish in upbringing but having considered himself for years an agnostic, he became convinced during his late twenties that he had a religious calling to become a Trappist monk. Shortly after baptism he came into contact with Schucman and Thetford. Though he immediately felt to be in touch with “two very holy people”, it was still a half year later and after a meditational stay in Israel before he allowed himself really to enter into the ACIM- material. Then, he realized at once that it was to become his life’s work. Instead of becoming a monk and entering a monastery, it was in Helen and Bill that he had found his “spiritual family”.\[12\] During the years of channeling and putting it all on paper, Thetford and Schucman had already spent some time on breaking the manuscript into sections, determining the precise punctuation and capitalization. Now Wapnick volunteered to take this editing job on his shoulders. It took him almost two years before ACIM was ready for print.\[13\]

Despite their long and intimate cooperation, the relationship between Schucman and Thetford had become complicated and was even worsening. Publication lying at hand, the atmosphere was withdrawn and reclusive. Only a very small in-crowd knew of the ACIM’s existence. The situation improved with the entrance of Judy Skutch Whitson in May 1975, who was a lecturer at New York University on parapsychology. Wapnick observes that, providing “a clear external focus”, she was “the direct stimulus for bringing Helen and Bill out of the closet”. Skutch Whitson had many friends and contacts in the New Age community, and it was her “infectious enthusiasm for the Course …[that] led Helen and Bill to consent to meet with groups of people” in order to present the material and tell their story to others.\[14\] A year later, in 1976, the first hard cover edition was printed. Fitting with the reluctance and inner ambivalence regarding the entire genesis and content of the Course, Schucman et Thetford did not want their names explicitly connected with it in public. Therefore, A Course in Miracles appeared in print without the names of its authors on the cover. Not wanting to start a personality cult, it was their conviction that the material “stands completely on its own”. It is meant as a self-study course and its originators considered themselves as no more than its students.\[15\]

In the following sections I will trace out the teachings of A Course in Miracles, according to the fixed elements Cosmology (4.1), Hamartiology (4.2) and Human potential (4.3). However, as the elements and the main themes under discussion are strongly interdependent and intertwined, the main structure will not be maintained rigidly. In some cases, themes will be touched upon in advance while their proper treatment follows in later stage. In the final section (4.4 Inventory of findings) the results will be collected in the Inventory Table for further discussion.

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12 Wapnick, Absence, 5; 10.
13 Skutch, Journey, 89f.
14 Wapnick, o.c., 362. At first these meetings were held in the Bay Area of San Francisco, “Judy’s second home at that time”, California lying safely far away from New York.
15 Skutch, o.c., 107.
4.1 Cosmology

The cosmology presented in *ACiM*, is framed in an over-all religious understanding of reality, a thé-ontology. And although Descartes (together with Newton) is never regarded by New Age representatives as a positive source of inspiration, there is, nonetheless, remarkable *prima facie* likeness and closeness in phrasing between the Course and the French philosopher.16 According to Cartesian rationalism – as opposed to Bacon’s empiricism - the original source of knowledge is not observation by the senses, but the *intellectual intuition* of clear and distinct ideas. Under the influence of present-day individualism (and growing scepticism) in most streams of Western liberalism, one might be tempted to take this intuitive source of knowledge as a purely subjective human affair. Descartes, however, did not in the least intend to dispense with God in favour of human autonomy; instead, he saw the reliability of intellectual intuition in humans as being upheld by God. As observed by a critical mind like Karl Popper, the Cartesian epistemology leaned heavily on theology, i.e., “on the important theory of the *veracitas dei*. What we clearly and distinctly see to be true must indeed be true. For otherwise God would be deceiving us. Thus, the truthfulness of God must make truth manifest”.17

Now, if we alter intellectual intuition into inspirational *vision* by the mind or by reason and change the *veracitas* into the love of God, we find ourselves in the centre of the teachings of *ACiM*. According to the Course, as regards the epistemological question, it is not through the body’s eyes but by reason18 that true knowledge can be received. With respect to the theological foundation, it is stated that the true and only reality we come to see this way – gained by reason, guided by the Holy Spirit – is nothing else than the *love of God*, which, being the only reality that truly is, is the basis of human love and therefore of human reality as well. As such, love is the guarantee and means by which truth is envisioned. To put it the other way around, love or - as the Course teaches - “forgiveness … is the means by which illusions disappear”.19

It should be noted, however, that in these *ACiM*-perspectives a third ontological element has slipped in alongside of the epistemological source and its theological foundation. God or ‘love of God’ are not only the foundation of true knowledge – like Descartes’ *veracitas dei* – but God or his love are also equated with and identified as *reality as such*. Compared to the philosopher, *ACiM* is steering a different course: apparently by letting the epistemological question concerning *truth* and true *knowledge* more or less fall together with the ontological question concerning genuine *reality*, thus fusing both questions into an overall thé-ontology.

As a result, the distinction of truth and reality in *ACiM* is difficult to capture. Yet, I will try to do so by distinguishing two partly epistemic but largely ontological aspects of the Course’s thé-ontology: a. Formal aspect: the exclusivity of (the) mind and b. Material aspect: the holistic unity of love - the Sonship. These two aspects of reality

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16 Similarity with Descartes is also mentioned by Daren Kemp, though with respect to another point, namely the element of doubt, see Kemp, New Age, 16f.
17 Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 7. Also: 15: Instead of solely emphasizing human independence and self-sufficiency, Descartes’s epistemology “remains essentially a religious doctrine in which the source of all knowledge is divine authority”. Popper observed a similar foundation regarding Bacon’s empiricism as based on the *veracitas naturae*.
18 i.e., through inspired “vision”, see resp. T-21.V.II.7 (432); T-21.V.8-9 (427); T-20.II.5 (398)
19 W-pI.46.2 (73) referring to *ACiM* Workbook-part I.lesson 46. section 2 (page 73).
coincide more or less - certainly not entirely - with the epistemological and the ontological side of *ACiM*’s cosmology. The formal aspect, however, goes far beyond the epistemic function as the human mind is not so much seen as being mainly receptive, but primarily as creative. The mind is continuously giving rise to many ‘realities’, many of which, however, are not true realities but illusions. This means that, although students of *ACiM* must learn to accept only one true reality, this one genuine reality is actually entrenched in a no man’s land of unreality, to be discussed as c. One reality, many illusions. Finally, the material aspect or genuine reality, according to the Course, is characterized by the basic ontological quality of changelessness which I will discuss under d. Reality is changeless.

4.1.a. Formal (ontological) aspect: exclusivity of the mind

The formal premise underlying the entire ontology of *ACiM* is the *all formative* role of the mind. Clearly, this is similar to the “priority of the mind” in the system of Jane Roberts (3.1.a) but, with respect to the purely monistic cosmology of the Course, the stronger qualification ‘exclusivity’ is more appropriate. All (kinds) of reality, including dreams, illusions, as well as physical reality, are envisioned as creations of (the) mind. In sharp contrast to the empiricist high regard for the outer or sensible world, the entire world according to *ACiM* is one of ideas. These ideas or thoughts – and envisioned reality therewith – grow stronger by being shared or given away, since “the more who believe in them the stronger they become”.²⁰ Through teaching and learning, ideas provoke a change in motivation which is “a change of mind”. And this, says the Course, will inevitably produce “fundamental change because the mind is fundamental”.²¹ By contrast, the outer world you see is no more than

the witness to your state of mind, the outside picture of an inward condition. As a man thinketh, so does he perceive. Therefore, seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world. Perception is a result and not a cause.²²

The cause is in the mind, in what you choose to see, resulting in perception of what you actually see. There is no guarantee, though, that what thus comes to your eyes is true or genuine reality. Actual perception is but a witness to “your whole belief in what you are … and never to reality”.²³ This ‘belief’, in turn, depends entirely on what you opt to hear or see or feel. If you feel the “Love of God within you”, the world you see is totally different from the world you see through darkened “eyes of malice and of fear”. Which one it will be depends on you yourself, since “perception is a choice and not a fact”.²⁴ Therefore, it is very important to have the right “desire”,²⁵ to recognize the “power of your wanting”, and to accept “its strength and not its weakness”.²⁶

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²⁰ T-5.I,1-2 (67).
²¹ T-6.V.II.2 (98f).
²² T-21.Introd.1 (415); cf. W-pI.23.2 (34): There is no point in trying to change the world. It is incapable of change because it is merely an effect. But … changing your thoughts about the world … you are changing the cause. The effect will change automatically.
²³ T-21.V.1 (425); cf.: “Perception is a choice and not a fact”.
²⁴ Resp. W-pl.189.1-3 (349); T-21.V.1 (425)
²⁵ T-21.II.5 (431): *Do I desire a world I rule instead of one that rules me? Do I desire a world where I am powerful instead of helpless?*
²⁶ T-21.II.4 (418); the strong emphasis on the right “desire” (previous note) and on the ‘power of the
Thus, according to the cosmology of ACiM, reality in all realized forms of perception is a *construction of the mind*: no matter whether a perceived ‘reality’ is considered to be something real or an illusion. In other words, you see what you want to see and you hear what you choose to hear. One way or the other, one is constantly *creating his/her own reality*. Simultaneously, however, it is stated by the Course that the truly real world can only be “revealed … through vision.” So, genuine reality is *not only* a matter of strong will, desire and one’s own creation. It is something that must be ‘given’ as well. Being there already, it must be revealed by the Holy Spirit (see below 4.3.b). This brings us to what I designate as the ‘material’ aspect of reality.

**4.1.b. Material (ontological) aspect: the holistic unity of love - the Sonship**

By speaking of the ‘material’ aspect of reality, I do not mean something ‘physical’ which would, of course, be contradictory to the exclusive or monistic rank of the mind. Instead, what is intended is the substantial heart or essence of reality. It is about the question: what is understood by ACiM as truly true and genuinely real? In line with the formal aspect, true reality cannot be seen through the outer body’s eyes or senses, as nothing perceived without inner vision means anything. Vision is the adequate perception of yourself and others as who you really are. What vision shows is not something basically new, nor something strictly individual or personal. Instead, it coincides, on the one hand, with the vision of Christ and, on the other, with the remembrance of an ancient and long “forgotten song”. Both sides refer to one true original reality. True vision involves the reception of an all-encompassing golden light, wherein “everything is joined in perfect continuity”. It is impossible to imagine anything truly real outside of it or separated from it, for “there is nowhere that this light is not”. It shows reality as it is in

the vision of the Son of God, whom you know well. Here is the sight of him who knows his Father. Here is the memory of what you are; a part of this, with all of it within, and joined to all as surely as all is joined in you. Accept the vision that can show you this, and not the body. … Nothing will ever be as dear to you as is this ancient hymn the Son of God sings to his Father still.

The genuine, most basic reality as perceived by the Son is his true and fundamental relationship to God and to other humans as a shared identity, consisting in holistic

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27 T-21.VII.7 (432); also: T-21.VII.13 (433).
29 T-21.I.1(415f); sec. 6 (416): “Not the whole song has stayed with you, but just a little wisp of melody”.
30 T-21.I.9 (417)
31 The genitive in “vision of the Son” is a *genitivus subjectivus*, cf. the dutch translation of the same text: “Dit is de visie van Gods Zoon, hem die jij goed kent. Hier is het zicht van hem die zijn Vader kent” (Dutch Translation T-21.I.9 (458)). What is meant, according to ACiM, is the vision Christ had regarding himself *and* his fellow humans as fully part of the genuine Sonship of God. This implies that everyone with the full ‘vision’ of this truth, is a “son” him/herself. NB: ACiM only speaks of Sonship and son(s) of God, daughters tacitly included.

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unity. This thé-ontologically determined unity is called the Sonship, which comprises more than just Jesus Christ. It embraces the basic togetherness and common nature of all humans in undivided unity with God the Father. They are “all the same; all beautiful and equal in their holiness”\(^{32}\). With respect to this essential core of reality, it is of vital importance that Christ and all other humans have a common name, a shared identification:

The Name of God’s Son is one, and you are enjoined to do the works of love because we share this oneness. Our minds are whole because they are one. If you are sick you are withdrawing from me. Yet you cannot withdraw from me alone. You can only withdraw from yourself and me.\(^{33}\)

The ‘Voice’ that is speaking here is identified as Christ, sharing his name and identity of being Son of God with all of humankind. All ordinary men and women have their ‘self’, their true being not only in themselves, but in Him, as well as in all others, because “God’s Son is one”. According to the Course, every human being is a Son of God and must therefore be “an integral part of the whole Sonship”.\(^{34}\) This means that no one can deny the Son of God – i.e., Jesus Christ - without denying him or herself. At the same time, you cannot deny a son of God either without harming the total Sonship and thus, again, without denying yourself. In fact, it is this downright religious vision on genuine reality (therefore thé-ontology) that forms the material aspect, the core of the entire system.

Summarizing, I conclude that genuine reality is exclusively recognized in the unity of love called the Sonship, the holistic unity of all (spirit-oriented) minds. All of humankind is seen as united in the one Sonship or Kingdom of God. This unity, including God and His whole creation, has never really changed since the beginning. Thus, it is stated as a matter of fact by the Course that the “oneness of the Creator and the creation is your wholeness, your sanity and your limitless power”.\(^{35}\) And when this oneness is commonly acknowledged again as the only reality that is, then heaven is re-stored.\(^{36}\) In connection with this material aspect, we have discerned as formal presupposition that the mind has exclusive ontological priority. This supreme role of (the) mind has to be taken not only in an epistemological sense but in an unreserved causative and creative sense. ‘Reality’ – genuine and illusory - is not only observed by the mind but it is also and even primarily produced or created by the mind. It is this formal but all-determining role of the mind that makes different grades of reality and illusions possible and actual.

\(^{32}\) T-13.VIII.6 (241f.); regarding the holistic unity, see, e.g., T-10.IV (174): “The Sonship cannot be perceived as partly sick, because to perceive it that way is not to perceive it at all. If the Sonship is one, it is one in all respects”.

\(^{33}\) T.8.IX.7 (147); as regards the identification with Christ and secondarily even with God, cf. T.11.VIII.9 (197): “Be not deceived in God’s Son, for thereby you must be deceived in yourself. And being deceived in yourself you are deceived in your Father, in Whom no deceit is possible”.

\(^{34}\) Cf. T.17.III.7 (332): God’s Son is one. Whom God has joined as one, the ego cannot put asunder; and: T.2.VII.6 (29): God has only one Son. If all His creations are His Sons, everyone must be an integral part of the whole Sonship.

\(^{35}\) T-7.VI.10 (116).

\(^{36}\) T-18.I.11 (349).
4.1.c. One reality, many illusions

Although all reality proceeds from the mind, I have called the exclusive role of the mind ‘formal’ because the mind’s creativity does not cogently imply that everything that is made up by our minds amounts to genuine reality. This is because our mind contains an own-made illusory ‘part’ (ego) and a created or real ‘part’ (spirit). In connection with these parts, it is useful to consider the distinction made in ACIM between making versus creating, which is tantamount to projection versus extension. As ‘mind’ means life, “every mind must project or extend”. When your mind is experiencing threat and fear, it will (try to) recognize this elsewhere, projecting aggression and anger onto others. Simultaneously, you will feel the need to defend yourself against these attacks, even though they are made up by your own illusory perception. In this way the isolated and vulnerable part of your mind, feeling itself under threat, emerges as your ego. This ego is not really you, not your capital Self, but the “self you made” which is actually a bunch of illusions. In its own sense, projection can be considered as a form of extension, albeit from fear. It is out of fear that the entirely illusory ego world is made.

As opposed to our making through projection, the notion of ‘extension’ is in the Course intrinsically connected with creation defined as the extension of ‘love’ or of ‘being’ which is especially designated as ‘spirit’. In this context it is stated in ACIM that being must be extended. That is how it retains the knowledge of itself. Spirit yearns to share its being as its Creator did. Created by sharing, its will is to create. It does not wish to contain God, but wills to extend His Being. The extension of God’s Being is spirit’s only function.

To create is to share or extend being, both of which are forms of emanation. Spirit is the being of God, yearning to create, to share and extend. Thus God, being all encompassing spirit, extended himself, sharing spirit and created you “by extending Himself as you”. Instead of saying that God is in you, it is more adequate to say that “you are part of Him”, that you are “of one mind and spirit with Him”. In fact it is stated that “everything He created is given all His power … and shares His Being with Him”. This means that, as extensions of Him, we can only go on extending ourselves and extending ‘spirit’ as He did. Creating like Him is “to share the perfect Love He shares with you”.

Thus, as spirit which is divine ‘being’ and which is “the nature of our true reality”, we yearn for connection and sharing. As spirit we want to create and extend the being and love that we received from the Creator. On the other hand, according to our own made ego-self, we make division and enlarge it through projecting possible fear

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37 T-7.VIII.1 (120).
38 This is what earlier has been designated as “creating your own reality”. In the parlance of ACIM this should be ‘making your own reality’ when it concerns the ‘makings’ of the ego.
39 In fact, it is stated that “to create is to love. Love extends outward simply because it cannot be contained” (104,3).
40 T-7.IX.2-3 (122f).
41 Resp. T-7.I.5 (105); T-5.II.5 (70); and T-5.VII.3 (82); see also T-6.IV.2 (93): When God created you He made you part Him.
42 Resp. T-7.IX.2 (122) and T-7.1.6 (105).
43 Wapnick, Glossary Index, 198.
and anger. Depending on the part of the mind that is active, the ‘making’ or ‘creation’ of one’s own reality can be either a fabrication of illusions or the realisation of miracles:

whatever you accept into your mind has reality for you. It is your acceptance of it that makes it real. If you enthrone the ego in your mind, your allowing it to enter makes it your reality. This is because the mind is capable of creating reality or making illusions.\textsuperscript{44}

I conclude that the formal creativity of the mind inevitably gives rise to the perception of something. This makes the notion of “idle thoughts” self-contradictory. Every thought ‘creates’ or ‘makes’ some ‘reality’, either “it extends the truth or it multiplies illusions … either peace or war; either love or fear”.\textsuperscript{45} Which it will be depends on which part of your mind is active (ego or spirit), as well as on other thé-anthropological elements (‘you’, your Self, the Holy Spirit …). These elements, the perspective on their interaction, and the valuation of the outcome with respect to essential reality will be further discussed in 4.3 Human Potential.

4.1.d. Reality is changeless

Thus far we have seen that the distinguishing mark of the thé-ontology of \textit{ACiM} is the identification of genuine reality as the holistic unity of love called the Sonship or Kingdom of God (material aspect), created by God through extension of himself. In other words, genuine reality is not only something of the mind (formal aspect) but it is \textit{eo ipso} and ontologically something religious or spiritual. Further, it is strongly professed that the Sonship is undivided, that the genuine reality of the Kingdom encompasses all of humanity. In support of this perspective, it is stated that “reality is changeless”,\textsuperscript{46} since “whatever is true is eternal, and cannot change or be changed”.\textsuperscript{47}

Actually, this fundamental ontological axiom underlying the holistic essence of reality belongs to the core of \textit{ACiM} thinking and is a variety of ‘co-eternity with God’ (cf. 2.1.2.c.ii). Logically, the axiom of changelessness can take on two appearances. On the one hand, changelessness implies that genuine reality, being whole, must be ‘indestructible’, which is relevant with respect to the question of (natural) evil (4.2.a. Natural evil and indestructible reality). On the other hand, the assumption of changelessness implies that genuine reality is whole and undivided, meaning ‘not separated’. In this latter sense, it amounts to the denial of sin (4.2.b. Sin and the illusion of separation). Both sides will be explained in the next section.

4.2 Hamartiology

In order to learn that “God’s Will for me is perfect happiness”, the main thing students of \textit{ACiM} have to unlearn is the belief that salvation asks for “suffering as penance for your ‘sins’”. This is because ‘sin’ is regarded by the Course as the ‘mother’

\textsuperscript{44} T-5.V.4 (77).
\textsuperscript{45} W-pl.16.2-3 (26).
\textsuperscript{46} T-30.VIII.1 (597); cf. VIII.2 (598), where this changelessness of reality is attributed to the brotherhood of humankind: “Your brother has a changelessness in him beyond appearance and deception, both. It is obscured by changing views of him that you perceive as his reality”. For the implications: see below 4.3.c.
\textsuperscript{47} T-1.V.5 (10); the citation continues as follows: Spirit is therefore unalterable because it is already perfect.
of all illusions. Students of the Workbook are taught that

sin is not real, and all that you believe must come from sin will never happen, for it has no
cause. Accept atonement with an open mind, which cherishes no lingering belief that you
have made a devil of God’s Son. There is no sin. … God’s Will for you is perfect happiness
because there is no sin and suffering is causeless. Joy is just, and pain is but the sign you
have misunderstood yourself. 48

Apparantly, not only is “sin” denied as being real, but so are the collateral phe-
nomena that are usually discussed within its context, such as suffering and sickness,
pain and fear, anger and aggression. Therefore, I will turn now to addressing the
Course’s perspective on the classic forms of natural and religious evil: a. Natural evil
and indestructible reality and b. Sin and the illusion of separation, respectively. The
discussion of sin will be further elaborated in c. Origin and subject of the belief in sin;
d. Original error; and e. Actual errors. Next to natural and religious evil, traditionally
a third form of evil is identified as moral evil. As the discussion will show, it is not
relevant to address moral evil separately.

4.2.a. NATURAL EVIL AND INDESTRUCTIBLE REALITY

In order to relate the perspective of *ACIM* on natural evil, I will first discuss the
Course’s perspective on ‘bodily existence’ in general; secondly, I will illustrate this
in particular with the example of ‘physical sickness’. Given the formal but exclusive
ontological rank of the mind, we may expect the physical part of human existence to
be of minor relevance. At times, the body is considered to be a neutral device. It can
bring you “neither peace nor turmoil; neither joy nor pain”. It has no will, does not
judge itself, nor does it make itself to be what it is not. 49 In short, it has no *arbitrium*
of its own. Therefore, it can be used in entirely opposite ways.

4.2.a.i. BODILY EXISTENCE

On the one hand, the body can become a means of communication to reach the
minds of others. 50 As part of the physical world, the body can even be used by the
Holy Spirit as a “teaching device for bringing you home”. The body does not know
of anger, yet it can be “used for hate”. Thus, the body is an instrument of illusion. 51 It
is used as such by the part of the mind that is called the ego. In order to pretend and
uphold individual independency, the ego sees you as separated from God and divided
from your brothers. It rules the body as its private “kingdom” distinct from other bod-
ies. Thus, the body serves as the perfect evidence for the ego to stress the division of

48 W-pl.101.1; 5-6 (179). In *ACIM*, the *emic* meaning of the theological notions of ‘atonement’ and ‘sal-
vation’ is interdependent upon the formal priority of the mind. Salvation is the result of a change
of mind: we are saved from the belief in sin. Atonement means the correction or evaporation of the
illusion that there has ever been a separation or (inimical) split between God and (members of) his
Sonship.
49 T-19.IV.B.i.10 (386) and T-28.VI.1 (559), respectively.
50 T-8.VII.2 (140): “The ego separates through the body. The Holy Spirit reaches through it to others”;
also 7 (141): “yet thought is communication, for which the body can be used”; but compare also the
very opposite: T.18.VI.8-9 (360): The body is a limit imposed on the universal communication that is
an eternal property of mind. (…) is shutting you off from others and keeping you apart from them”.
51 Respectively, T-5.III.11 (74); T-28.VI.2 (560); and T-19.I.3 (371).
the Sonship, the separation between God and men. Actually, the ego and the body stand for a frontal negation of the Course’s thé-ontological maxim, discussed above as the material aspect of reality (4.1.b). For this reason, the speaker of *ACiM* has no regard for the body as being a relevant part of being a human person. In this context it is stated that

the body neither lives nor dies, because it cannot contain you who are life. If we share the same mind, you can overcome death because I did. (...) God did not make the body, because it is destructible, and therefore not of the Kingdom. The body is the symbol of what you think you are. It is clearly a separation device and therefore does not exist.

Like the ego, the body is not created by God. It is made by you, by your perception and is used as a symbol of the individualized self or ego that you think you are. Saying that the body is made by ourselves, however, is saying that it can be unmade as well, which means that the body is destructible.

At this point we meet with the first variation of the acclaimed changelessness of genuine reality, namely that reality being whole is *indestructible*. Genuine reality must be perfect and cannot be destroyed nor can it even be assaulted. Now, as it is obvious that bodies are assailable and can be destroyed, the logical implication is that bodies do not represent reality and are nothing real. In other words, your body has no definite relevance for you nor for the Kingdom, since it can by no means threaten or divide the real, holistic unity of God and the Sonship of all humanity. This non-valuation of the body can be illustrated with the Course’s understanding of the crucifixion. As a “model for learning”, the real meaning of the crucifixion lies in the apparent intensity of the assault of some of the Sons of God upon another. This, of course, is impossible, and must be fully understood as impossible. … The message the crucifixion was intended to teach was that it is not necessary to perceive any form of assault in persecution, because you cannot be persecuted. If you respond with anger, you must be equating yourself with the destructible, and are therefore regarding yourself insanely. … If you react as if you are persecuted, you are teaching persecution. This is not a lesson a Son of God should want to teach if he is to realize his own salvation. Rather, teach your own perfect immunity, which is the truth in you and realize that it cannot be assailed.

The crucifixion can teach us our perfect immunity. Our most basic reality as in-

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52 Respectively, T-18.VIII.3 (364); T-19.I.3 (371): a “segment of the mind”, which is the ego, uses the body “to demonstrate the ‘fact’ that separation occurred. The body thus becomes the instrument of illusion”.

53 W-pl.135.8 (246): “The body, valueless and hardly worth the least defence, need merely be perceived as quite apart from you”; W-pl.136.20 (253): “For I mistook my body for myself. … But I am not a body”.

54 T-6.V.A.1-2 (96f); see also W-pl.199 (372-73): “I am not a body. I am free”.

55 It is not clear, though, whether the body is seen as the creative ‘result’ of my own making/perception or as the logical ‘precondition’ for all perceiving, as it is also stated ambiguously: “The ability to perceive made the body possible, because you must perceive something and with something” (T-3.IV.6 (38)).

56 T-6.I.3-6 (85); the principle of changelessness as the indestructibility of genuine reality is also applied the other way around, in the sense that “anything that is destructible cannot be real” (T-6.1.4 (85)).

57 T-6.I.3-4, 6 (85); for a more elaborate exegesis *ACiM*-style, see: Wapnick, K., *Forgiveness and Jesus. The Meeting Place of ACiM and Christianity*, Foundation for *ACiM*: Temecula 2004 (1985), 233-251.
integral part in the Sonship or Kingdom cannot be destroyed nor even attacked. The body which can be attacked, then, is not an integral part of this unity, nor is it a part of you. Thus, although his body has been crucified, the supposed speaker of the Course can say that he was not persecuted, suggesting that no one ever is.

What is stated here is that our genuine reality as part of the Kingdom cannot be threatened de facto or physically. My genuine reality is a de iure or spiritual reality, which cannot be in any way deleted or even harmed, as it is “your own perfect immunity”. However, what can be threatened is not part of the real ‘you’. This means that, given its liability to threat and destruction from outside, the body (together with the supposed threat) can be equated with the “impossible” and the “insanely”, due to limited perception and illusion. From this, it is very unlikely that events traditionally associated with natural evil can have any real substance or relevance according to the Course. Proof of this may be taken from the example of physical sickness.

4.2.a.ii. Physical sickness

Like the killing on the cross, the reality of physical illness is denied on the basis of the axiomatic indestructibility of genuine reality:

sickness and perfection are irreconcilable. If God created you perfect, you are perfect. If you believe you can be sick, you have placed other gods before Him. God is not at war with the god of sickness you made, but you are. He is the symbol of deciding against God. … If you attack him, you will make him real to you. But if you refuse to worship him in whatever form he may appear to you, and wherever you think you see him, he will disappear into the nothingness out of which he was made. … To know reality must involve the willingness to judge unreality for what it is. To overlook nothingness is merely to judge correctly, and because of your ability to evaluate it truly, to let it go.

The ontological consequence (derived from the “changelessness of genuine reality”, 4.1.d) that reality’s wholeness implies ‘indestructibility’ inevitably means that physical sickness cannot be real in connection with the perfect creation that we are supposed to be. Therefore, sickness or the “god of sickness” is an expression of your deciding against God and against the wholeness and perfect integrity of Sonship. This opposition appears out of the unreality and “nothingness” that are neither willed, nor created by God. Apparently, it is entirely beyond the scope of the ACIM belief system to envision physical disease. As a symbol of opposing God, sickness is like an impossible possibility. Really being sick is impossible to you who “are perfect”. Yet in your perception, sickness can appear to your ego-mind as something real. The only solution is to judge it correctly for what it is, namely that the body is used by the ego part of the mind as an “instrument of illusion”. The illusion of illness only deserves to

58 Actually, this argumentation implies also a forthright negation of moral evil, at least through physical means.

59 T.6.V.A.3 (97); also: W-pI.199 and 201-220, all repeating the mantra: “I am not a body. I am free. For I am still as God created me”.

60 T-6.I.11 (86): “You are not persecuted, nor was I”; cf. also I.15 (87): “I could not have said (to Judas): ‘Betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?’ unless I believed in betrayal. The whole message of the crucifixion was simply that I did not”. Neither did Judas deserve any punishment. “Judas was my brother and a Son of God, as much a part of the Sonship as myself. … Condemnation is impossible”.

61 Using the words ‘de facto – de iure’, I anticipate the similar distinction prompted by Barth (7.3.1).

62 T-10.IV.1,2 (173v).
be overlooked and let go by the higher part of your mind. Actually, both the supposed
physical sickness and its healing do not take place in the body but in the mind:

the body cannot heal, because it cannot make itself sick. It needs no healing. Its health or
sickness depends entirely on how the mind perceives it and the purpose that the mind would
use it for.\textsuperscript{63}

In line with the mind’s ontological supremacy, all forms of physical sickness or
pain, even unto death, are just physical expressions of the ego-part of the mind. They
may be the result of one’s fear of “awakening” spiritually, of “withdrawing yourself
from me (Christ)” or of not being of one mind with Him.\textsuperscript{64} Sickness can be a witness
of unforgiving thoughts.\textsuperscript{65} In all cases, “sickness is not of the body, but of the mind”.
All bodily experience is but a reflection of the choices and purposes of one’s mind.
Pain and sickness are signs “that the mind is split and does not accept a unified pur-
pose”. Accordingly, healing can be circumscribed as the “unification of purpose” or
the “re-establishing of meaning in a chaotic thought system”. What is intended is that
we return to the awareness of meaning which is tantamount to the awareness of our
the-ontological union with God, a union that is irrevocable and beyond recall:

your return to meaning is essential to His, because your meaning is part of His. Your heal-
ing, then, is part of His health, since it is part of His Wholeness. He cannot lose this, but
you can not know it. Yet it is still His Will for you, and His Will must stand forever and in
all things.\textsuperscript{66}

Again, we are faced with the ‘material’ aspect that is the Course’s spiritual hard
core of reality, saying that the real ‘you’ is part of God and that your healing is part of
His health and Wholeness. When \textit{ACiM} states that “He cannot lose this”, it is meant
to be taken seriously as a statement of \textit{ontological character}, not only concerning God
but also concerning ourselves and the entire Sonship. It is our fundamental truth, the
most genuine reality that is attributed to us by God, and that, therefore, is ours \textit{de iure}.
We may not know it yet spiritually; and \textit{de facto}, in outer existence, it may appear to
the ego as totally absent and absurd. Yet, our health and wholeness have, so to speak,
a \textit{character indelebilis}. God cannot lose it nor can we lose it. Our genuine reality is
simply beyond the body, though not outside ourselves.\textsuperscript{67} The one you really are (i.e.,
the real \textit{you}) is immune to physical inference since the divine Wholeness in which you
participate stands forever. Accordingly, the Course can state that there “is no death but

\textsuperscript{63} T-19.I.3 (371); at this point there is a strong likeness to the American metaphysical movements of the
late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Christian Science, New Thought) with a strong emphasis
on healing through the power of mind, see Satter, \textit{Each Mind a Kingdom}. William James (in: \textit{Varieties})
referred to these movements as “mind-cure” movements, combining their emphasis on the power of the
mind with healing.

\textsuperscript{64} Resp. T-8.IX.3 (146); T-8.IX.7 (147); and T-8.IX.8 (148).

\textsuperscript{65} See “The Song of Prayer”, in \textit{Supplements to ACiM}, 32: Sickness is “a sign, a shadow of an evil
thought that seems to have reality and to be just, according to the usage of the world. It is external proof
of inner “sins”, and witnesses to unforgiving thoughts that injure and would hurt the Son of God”. Cf.
also T-28.VI.5 (560): Sickness is anger taken out upon the body.

\textsuperscript{66} T-8.IX.8-9 (148).

\textsuperscript{67} T.18.VI.10 (360f); also 11 (361): “Everyone has experienced what he would call a sense of being trans-
ported beyond himself”, explained as a “sudden unawareness of the body”.

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there is a belief in death”.

Given this ontological perspective, the conclusion must be that within the cosmology of the Course, there can be no recognition of natural evil. The body and all corporeal matter are considered as not created by God. As outside pictures of inward states of the human ego-mind, they are no more than our own makings: illusory perceptions proceeding from “limited awareness” and therefore: ‘realities’ of a minor or second order. Just as they are made by the ego-mind, they can be reversed or undone without ado.

4.2.b. Sin and the illusion of separation (individual soul)

The second variation of the “changelessness of reality” concerns the thesis that genuine reality, being whole, cannot be divided or separated (4.1.d). Given this belief in the indelible unity and wholeness of the Sonship, the possibility of separation between humans and God, which is largely tantamount to the belief in sin, is considered by the Course as the mother of all illusions.

Against this idea of sin/separation stands the creed of my never-failing holiness as part of God, which is a holiness that “envelops everything I see”. Students of ACiM are taught that if “your mind is part of God’s, you must be sinless, or a part of His Mind would be sinful”. This all-pervading maxim of my indelible holiness is sometimes emphasized to the verge of paradox. This happens when, despite the ontologically-based non-recognition of evil and sinful division, it is stated that “the belief in separation is the ‘devil’”. The reference to the ‘devil’ is a quite remarkable choice of concept and demonstrates that at least the belief in sin is considered by the Course as the mother of all illusions.

Before pursuing this agenda, I want to note that (the denial of) ‘separation’ is not only theologically relevant to the religious relationship but has significant bearing also on the anthropological theme of the human self, in particular on the question of being an authentic human person in distinction from others. In this respect, it is remarkable that the idea of the individual “soul” is absent in ACiM. As it is explained in the last part of the Course called “Clarification of terms”, the Christian soul is considered “highly controversial”. In ACiM, it is replaced by the notion of “spirit”, being the only real part in humans, over against the illusory part, the ego. And it is only in the illusory state of ego-reality that the concept of an individual mind “seems to be meaningful”, even though it stands beyond doubt that separated individuality is by no means applicable to the spirit part. It cannot be, since the human spirit-Self is identified as “being of God”. As such, it “is eternal and was never born”. It was created, though not as a separated individual ‘thing’ like the Christian soul created ex nihilo, but in ACiM-terms: created through

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68 T.3.VII.5 (46).
69 T-18.VI.11 (361); for the distinction between making versus creating, see 4.1.c; also: T-4.I.11 (50): “God is as incapable of creating the perishable as the ego is of making the eternal”.
70 W-pl.36.1 (55); also Lessons 35-39.
71 Cf. T.3.VII.5 (45): The mind can make the belief in separation very real and very fearful, and this belief is the “devil”.
72 Cl.-I.3(75).
extension. God extended himself (his being, spirit, love) as you (4.1.c). The implication is that in essence, humans – being God’s extensions - are neither divorced from God, nor are they really separated individuals from each other. Seen from this perspective, not only the notion of the ego but the Christian notion of the immortal soul as well: both carry an unmistakable but - according to ACiM - erroneous suggestion of separated individuality. For that reason, while the ego is deemed illusory, the notion of the soul is simply evaded in ACiM. I take notice that the Course displays little to no interest in the idea of individual human personality.73

4.2.c. Origin and subject of the belief in sin

The origin and supposed subject of the false belief in sin lies in the ego, who raised “the first question ever asked”. This question is: “what are you?” According to ACiM, the only real answer is that I am and always have been a holy and beloved son of God who never left his father, which is largely the ACiM version of human co-eternity with God. (4.1.b.). But the ego suggests otherwise. The ego is the part of your mind “that believes you are separate and outside the Mind of God”. The question it asked was the beginning of doubt.74 The suggestion is that, being divided from God, you lack something and would be better off in a somehow different state. Inadvertently, we are reminded of the serpent’s suggestion in the biblical story of the first sin. In the perspective of ACiM, “separation is the meaning of the fall” and the ego is its symbol.75 In many ways, the ego and the metaphor ‘separation’ stand for all that in traditional theology is connected with sin and subsequent guilt.

The ego is the part of the mind that believes in division. How could part of God detach itself without believing it is attacking Him? We spoke before … of usurping God’s power. The ego believes that this is what you did because it believes that it is you. If you identify with the ego, you must perceive yourself as guilty. Whenever you respond to your ego you will experience guilt, and you will fear punishment. The ego is quite literally a fearful though. … [namely,] of attacking God (…) It represents a delusional system and speaks for it. Listening to the ego’s voice means that you believe it is possible to attack God, and that a part of Him has been torn away by you. Fear of retaliation from without follows, because the severity of guilt is so acute that it must be projected.76

Having embarked on the illusory path of supposed sin, all further perceptions of your ego go without saying and its decisions are determined by the need of somehow vindicating its first error. Holding itself guilty of attacking God, the ego feels the urge to project this outwardly. It does so by supposing itself to be victim of aggression by others, thus entangling you in never ending circles of attack and defence. Far from giving your strength, however, your fancied ego-need to defend itself is only further

73 See Cl.-1.2 (75): “In this world, because the mind is split [into spirit and ego], the Sons of God appear to be separate. Nor do their minds seem to be joined. In this illusory state, the concept of an ‘individual mind’ seems to be meaningful” (italics mine). See also Wapnick, Absence, 4, describing Schuckman’s uneasy relationship to Jesus as one of both love and hate which, however, but veiled a higher capital Love: “For beyond the personal and ambivalent side to Helen, rested a totally different self. In fact, ‘Self’ may be a more appropriate spelling, for this part of her inner life was totally impersonal (italics ff)), and transcended the love-hate relationship with Jesus that in effect was her personal self”. Note that the totally different ‘Self’ that is definitely seen as the real Helen, is said to have “transcended” the personal self, and is thus localized beyond the personal.

74 T-6.IV.2 (93).
75 T-1.VI.1 (11) and T-5.V.2 (77).
76 T-5.V.3 (77).
sabotaging the holy peace of God as long as you “behold the Son of God as but a victim to attack”.77 Thus, the basic problem is not that we do or did “affront to God” but that we erroneously think so. In effect, this thought is an illusion. Nevertheless, it is on the basis of this illusion that, as egos, we attribute a punishing intent to God as well,78 to which the Course equally opposes.

The statement “Vengeance is Mine, sayeth the Lord” is a misperception by which one assigns his own “evil” past to God. The “evil” past has nothing to do with God. ... God does not believe in retribution. ... He does not hold your “evil” deeds against you. Is it likely that He would hold them against me? Be very sure that you recognize how utterly impossible this assumption is, and how entirely it arises from projection. This kind of error is responsible for a host of related errors, including the belief that God rejected Adam and forced him out of the Garden of Eden.79

All images, including biblical ones, suggesting any inimical dichotomy between God and humans, either as human affront or divine retribution, are dismissed as based on erratic misperception and projection, made up by the part of our mind that is the ego. These errors about a so-called “evil” past are mainly the result of anxious uncertainty (fear) and the itching drive of the ego to justify and fortify its own assumed position. However, in the thé-ontological perspective of the Course no sinful separation or inimical split between God and humans is possible. For that reason, conceptions of atonement in the form of a required satisfaction or even some ‘penal theory’ – Christ bearing the punishment due to humans by voluntary substitution – are to be considered as illusions based on misperception all the same. Nevertheless, ACIM does teach its own rendering of atonement and forgiveness (see 4.3.c). This inevitably presupposes something equivalent or parallel to the Christian notion of sin, both original and actual.

4.2.d. Original error

The remarkable equation of the belief in separation with the ‘devil’ (4.2.b) shows that although belief in sin may be considered illusory, it is certainly not taken lightly. In fact, the reference to the mythical prince of darkness suggests a kind of equivalent to sin. Not unlike traditional doctrines of original sin, an unbridgeable gulf is acknowledged by ACIM between the ego and spirit, between the human self and God:

Nothing can reach spirit from the ego, and nothing can reach the ego from spirit. Spirit can neither strengthen the ego nor reduce the conflict within it. The ego is a contradiction. Your self and God’s Self are in opposition. They are opposed in source, in direction and in outcome. They are fundamentally irreconcilable, because spirit cannot perceive and the ego cannot know. They are therefore not in communication and can never be in communication.80

77 W.p.I.153.5 (277); This picture of the ego is mirrored in biographical elements of the life of Helen Schuckman, cf. Wapnick, Absence, 368ff. on her difficult and ambivalent relationship with ACIM: “she fought tooth and nail and determinedly chose, in the end, not to practice its teachings” (368), she had to cope with the “tremendous level of fear which led her to hold tenaciously on to the ego thought system, and her self-hatred over not being able to choose again – for God instead of the ego” (369); regarding her dominant and compelling personality Wapnick observes: “Helen’s ego was such that she always had to be center-stage” (369v); further 424ff..
78 Cf. T-5.V.5 (78).
79 T-3.I.3 (32f).
80 T-4.1.2 (48).
Although all thoughts about ‘separation’ and ‘sin’ are to be considered as illusions, the gulf between God and humans, between the divine Self and the human ego-self is pictured in a quite unpromising way here. One is tempted to say that it is presented as even more bleak and hopeless than in most traditional versions of original sin in Christian theology, since the Course attributes a non posse not only to the ego but even to God. They are mutually without reach of one another. Instead of using the word ‘sin’ though, the Course refers to an “original error”.81

According to ACiM it is vital not to confuse error with sin. Error can be corrected, but “sin, were it possible, would be irreversible”. The erroneous belief in sin is based on the mistaken conviction “that minds, not bodies, can attack”. This would make the mind guilty forever “unless a mind not part of it can give it absolution”.82 If sin were real, it would imply a genuine possibility “to violate reality and to succeed”, i.e., to split the holistic unity of all minds and thus to destroy indestructible reality (4.1.d; 4.2.a). Man, being created an innocent Son of God, would be able to make himself guilty and “to make himself what God created not”. Thus creation would be “seen as not eternal and the Will of God open to opposition and defeat”.83 There “would be a power beyond God’s … that could attack His Will and overcome it”, sin being “mightier than God”.84 In a word, if sin were possible, it would not only change reality, but also create an “evil that cannot be corrected”.85 Contrary to all this confusion, however, it is emphasized by the Course that the reality of holistic unity and love came into being by creation through extension. This implies that everything created, any segment of the Sonship, is part of the Creator. In this cosmological frame, it is “impossible that what is part of Him is totally unlike the rest”. It would involve a split within God, who would then become “at war with Himself…, torn between good and evil; partly sane and partially insane”. If this were so, God must have created “what wills to destroy Him, and has the power to do so”. This seems to be a very fearful thought within the mindset behind ACiM. Therefore, it is asked rhetorically: “Is it not easier to believe that you have been mistaken than to believe in this?”86 In view of the essential, genuine reality of the holistic Sonship, the conclusion must be that sin is not to be considered as a genuine, but as an impossible possibility. This means in ACiM idiom that sin is an illusion.

Basically, the original error is no more than the wrong answer to a wrong question, which was the “first question ever asked” (4.2.c). In response to this unessential question, you perceived the real, holistic and loving unity of God and His Sonship as divided and came to accept a substitute reality “of illusion for truth; of fragmentation for wholeness”.87 Although this “one error … was all you ever made” it is vital to realize

81 T-18.I.4-5 (347f).
82 T-19.II.1 (374)
83 T.19.II.2 (375)
84 T.19.III.7-8 (378).
85 T.19.III.1 (376). The hypothetical presentation by ACiM (namely that real sin would be irreparable and real separation be “irreconcilable” even for God) is more radical than any real doctrine of original sin ever has been, except, perhaps, the version of Matthias Flacius Ilyricus (1520-1575). This austere Lutheran considered the original “image of God” not only as destroyed but also as replaced by original sin, having become the new substance of human nature since the fall, see Weber, Grundlagen I, 630. The fact that most reformers determinedly rejected the perspective by Flacius, remarkably implies their vicinity to the thesis of indestructibility, offered by the Course, at least concerning the imago Dei (Hio).
86 T-19.III.6 (377).
its magnitude because “from it a world of total unreality had to emerge”. In essence, however, the original error can be seen as the fundamental-ontological misperception of genuine reality.

4.2.e. Actual errors

Similar to theological perspectives on original sin, the original error as envisioned by ACiM did not remain without consequences. Thus, in actual life, the original illusion of separation is re-enacted, e.g., when someone is “renouncing one aspect of the Sonship in favour of the other”, which inevitably results in special love to some and less love or special hate to others. For those who know only love, this is, of course, impossible. But those who believe in separation and think God has to be feared already have fallen victim to error and illusion. The original error has cast them “out of Heaven” and has “shattered” the heaven of wholeness into “meaningless bits of disunited perception”.

But whereas the inner dynamic from ‘original’ towards ‘actual’ is similar to the Christian doctrine of sin, ‘error’, according to ACiM, has nothing to do with sin nor with guilt. Calling it sin and investing it with guilt would imply that “it was accomplished in reality”, which it is not. This means that error, either original or actual, is not seen as an ‘evil’ reality, neither morally nor religiously, but as wrong perception. All error can best be called “madness”, leading to masses of ensuing mad illusions and erroneous perceptions on the ego level. The result seems to be total ignorance. As students of the Workbook are taught, your real thoughts are nothing that you think you think, just as nothing that you think you see is related to vision in any way. There is no relationship between what is real and what you think is real. Nothing that you think are your real thoughts resemble your real thoughts in any respect. Nothing that you think you see bears any resemblance to what vision will show you.

Apparently, it is possible to think and deliberate on two levels that are entirely separate and beyond reach of each other: the illusionary level of the ego and the real level of the divine one that you genuinely are. This view provokes the question regarding the human potential for escaping illusions and regaining the truth and genuine reality of yourself, which is to say, your true self as part of the Sonship. This will be our next concern (4.3 Human Potential).

Summarizing our findings thus far, we can say that ACiM, on the one hand, is very firm – and seemingly a bit anxious – in its denial of the reality of sin: real sin or guilt would impair and harm the changeless reality and wholeness of the Sonship irreversibly. For this reason, I think, the belief in sin is taken very seriously and described as “powerful, active, destructive and clearly in opposition to God, because it literally denies His Fatherhood”. In this wording and perspective, the belief in sin seems to be

88 T-18.I.4-5 (347f).
89 T-18.I.1 (347).
90 T-18.I.5 and 12 (348; 349).
91 T-18.I.6 (348).
92 W-pI.45.1 (71).
93 T-19.III.1 (376): “Sin is an idea of evil that cannot be corrected”.
94 T-3.VII.5 (45); the readers of ACiM are further reprimanded: “Look at your life and see what the devil
a close substitute for sin as described by Christian theology, all the more because the solution for this erroneous belief is designated in *ACiM* as “atonement”95. Atonement, too, will be discussed in the context of Human Potential (4.3).

4.3. **Human Potential**

The question of ‘human potential’ concerns our intention and ability to (re)gain ultimate reality. According to *ACiM*, this realization of ultimate reality is a matter of true vision replacing illusory perception. It concerns the true vision of your own genuine self, closely connected with the true vision of others as your ‘brothers’, being equally as holy as you and together with whom you are part of the changeless reality of the entire Sonship of God. In the previous sections, it appeared that our human potential seemed to be fluctuating between two poles.

On the one hand, the power of our own “will” and the strength of our “desire” were emphasized, according to which we perceive and create our own reality. In other words, either we envision our true and genuine reality (and that of others) or we make up an illusory world of ego projections. Both possibilities taken together point to a full, but only a formal, human potential. It can lead to the truly real as easy as to the fully illusory. With this state of affairs, the question of human potential is still unanswered. It changes into the question of how we can make the transition from the illusory to the real; from the ego world to the genuine world; from the self to the Self.

On the other hand, it appeared that the answer to this question is not only a matter of me myself, since it was also stated that the truly real world (material aspect) must to some extent be “revealed ... through vision”. True or genuine reality, at least to a certain extent, must be given (4.1.a, b). This latter point implies a mediating or revelatory element, a second pole that seems to lie beyond our individual potential alone. From a different point of view, we have also met these two poles as two levels of thought that are beyond reach of each other and, correspondingly, as two levels of self: the illusionary level of the ego and the real level of the divine one you genuinely are (4.2.e). Apparently, there is a ‘you’, as whom we are normally addressed in the Course. And this you, the personal mind we presently are, can either further develop as ego or become fully aware again of his/her holy sonship of God. But who is the chief executive officer that makes the choice for one development or the other?

In the first subsection I will recount this development as possible in either direction (a. Your development from self to Self). Secondly, I will address the question of ‘whence’ or by whom the development is made to go forward (b. The guidance of the Holy Spirit). Thirdly I will illustrate what is the desired result that happens to be the central aim of the entire *ACiM* as welll (c. Atonement and the miracle of forgiveness).

**4.3.a. Your Development from Self to Self**

The relationship and distinction between the two opposite selves into which a human mind can develop is discussed in the Workbook for Students under the title “Salvation comes from my one Self”. The capitalization of the “Self” as the driving agent of my salvation actually reflects the bipolarity exhibited in the introductory remarks.

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95 T-3.I (32-34).
Although you are one Self, you experience yourself as two; as both good and evil, loving and hating, mind and body. … The opposites you see in you will never be compatible. But one exists (1). The self you made can never be your Self, nor can your Self be split in two, and still be what It is and must forever be. A mind and body cannot both exist. Make no attempt to reconcile the two, for one denies the other can be real. If you are physical, your mind is gone from your self concept, for it has no place in which it could be really part of you. If you are spirit, then the body must be meaningless to your reality (3). Spirit makes use of mind as means to find its Self-expression. And the mind which serves the spirit is at peace and filled with joy. Its power comes from spirit, and it is fulfilling happily its function here. Yet mind can also see itself divorced from spirit, and perceive itself within a body it confuses with itself. Without its function then it has no peace, and happiness is alien to its thoughts (4). Yet mind apart from spirit cannot think. It has denied its Source of strength, and sees itself as helpless, limited and weak. Dissociated from its function now, it thinks it is alone and separate, attacked by armies massed against itself and hiding in the body’s frail support. Now must it reconcile unlike with like, for this is what it thinks that it is for (5).

The priority of ‘mind’ over against physical matter is strongly and exclusively reaffirmed to the extent of Gnostic depreciation of the body, given the parallel opposition of “good and evil … mind and body” (1) and the radical thesis that a “mind and body cannot both exist” (3). Further, it appears that “mind” can develop in two directions: towards spirit or into body. The first leads to your one or real Self, with a capital letter (1), the second to “the self you made” (3). The latter development is described as “mind divorced from spirit” (4) and “hiding in the body’s frail support” (5). This self-made, body inhabiting self is the ‘ego’, the part of the mind that affirms the reality of individual bodies and can only think in distinction, in separation and opposites. Its perspective on salvation, therefore, is to reconcile “unlike with like” (5). However, not only the physical self or ego but also the opposites that emerge in its wake (1) are just our own fabrication, resulting from perception and projection. Both are illusory and “meaningless to your reality” (3). Only the one, spiritual Self that you really are exists (1).

As can be observed, the reader of ACIM is approached as a personal mind, addressed as “you”. On the one hand, this “you” can make his/her own self (3). This occurs when you divorce your mind from “spirit” and choose to develop as ego and identify as physical. Mind, then, becomes less and less important to your self-concept. Since you have denied your “Source of Strength”, you will perceive yourself as helpless, limited and weak. As individual ego, separated from other egos, you experience your position always as threatened or victimized under the attack of others.

On the other hand, you can neglect your bodily existence, deny your separated individuality and, instead, identify with mind or spirit (3). Remarkably, however, this is not presented as something of your own making or doing. It is not the personal mind, not the initially addressed “you” that is primarily active then, but the “spirit”. “Spirit makes use of mind as means to find its Self-expression. And the mind which serves the spirit is at peace and filled with joy …” (4). Thus, either you make and develop

96 W.-p.I.96.1-5 (167); the numbers in brackets refer to the sections of Lesson 96.
97 Cf. Wapnick, Absence from Felicity, 459, pointing to “the strong Gnostic theme that runs throughout the material …”; more recently: Joseph, “Knowledge is Truth”, in Journal of Gnostic Studies (Vol. 2: issue 1).
98 However, the very word ‘ego’ is not used in this Lesson 96.
99 Cf. also T-7.VIII.4: “The ego is a confusion in identification. … It is the product of the misapplication of the laws of God by distorted minds that are misusing their power".
your own self (ego) and your own world of illusions, estranged from spirit and from other individualized minds. Or you can serve the spirit and find peace and joy in the loving community of the Sonship. Apparently, your potential is the potency to engage in the right alliance: to switch focus from body to spirit. But then the question remains of who actually is activating and finding “Self-expression”. Is it you? You as you presently are or you as you presently perceive yourself? You as ego? Or even so the spirit or the Holy Spirit? In the latter case, it is rather God who finds his Self-expression through us: that is, when we choose spirit instead of ego. Formally, our human potential is unlimited, especially in making illusions. But how great is our potential really (materially) in regaining and envisioning essential reality? And to what extent is it really our potential?

4.3.b. The guidance of the Holy Spirit

The closing questions of the previous subsection are prompted by the capitalization of the one, real “Self” you are supposed to be.100 How does this relate to the, once again, capitalized “Self-expression” that is found by the spirit and for which end the personal mind - that is, the human being addressed as “you” - is a means used by the spirit? The capitalization of Self suggests divine identity. Still, it is not clear yet why ‘spirit’ in humans is written with a small letter; and further, how it develops into a capitalized ‘Self’. Apparently, when spirit is created through extension or emanation from the divine origin, its co-eternal divinity becomes estranged from its origin and from its divine Self. Although this, of course, is entirely illusory, this estrangement or separation (nevertheless) happened when “you chose to leave Him”101 and started to believe and act as ego. It follows then that you, having enmeshed yourself in ego illusions, are now faced with the task of regaining or finding back your true Self. This is the process of atonement in which the ego and its errors must be reversed or undone.

At times the reversal of the ego (and its illusions) is presented as a simple matter of choice depending on your mind only: “as you made it [sc. the ego] by believing in it, so you can dispel it by withdrawing belief from it”.102 But the positive process of finding back and reaffirming your divine or true Self is not your affair only, neither is it a ‘small letter’ affair only, since the very process is moved forward gently and patiently by the capitalized Holy Spirit.103 When the ego illusions are strong, the Holy Spirit is “your remaining communication with God, which you can interrupt but cannot destroy”. He is your continuous “Guide in choosing”.104 In the process of regaining ultimate reality, the Holy Spirit is presented as the divine intervention accompanying the separation. After the ego was made by you, God placed the Holy Spirit in your mind. “His is the Voice That calls you back to where you were before and will be again”. The Holy Spirit is also designated by the Course as the “Christ Mind” and as the “Mind of Atonement”. In many ways, he is the one Voice calling us back to “the restoration

100 See the quotation corresponding with footnote 96: W.-pl.96.1-5, esp. 4.
101 T-5.II.5 (70).
102 ACIM, T-7.VIII.5 (121).
103 T-5.II.2 (69): The Holy Spirit is God’s Answer to the separation; T-5.III.11 (74): the Holy spirit, the re-interpreter of what the ego made, sees the world as a teaching device for bringing you home; also T-5.II.7 (70): The Voice of the Holy Spirit does not command, because it is incapable of arrogance. It does not demand … seeks no control. … It merely reminds. It is compelling only because of what it reminds you of; T-7.VI.13 (117): The Holy Spirit reminds you gently …
104 T-5.II.8 (70).
of the integrity of the mind" until the whole Sonship is healed. Clearly, without this holy extension of God, we would entirely lose ourselves in the “wrong-mindedness” of the ego. The Spirit, however, calls us back to “right-mindedness” or “miracle-mindedness”, which is the adequate state of mind to correct illusory perceptions and regain ultimate reality as it is. The miracles that happen on this path concern the rediscovery of the all underlying truth that “God is not a stranger to His Sons, and His Sons are not strangers to each other”. This formulation is, of course, an understatement. The ultimate aim of One-mindedness in which we really know God, the Sonship and our Self again, is a “pure experience of non-duality” which is heaven. The final step towards this eschatological stage is taken by God. Then time and illusions end together, and we are back again in the eternal and changeless pre-separation world of God and His unified creation or Kingdom which we had never really left.

4.3.c. Atonement and the miracle of forgiveness

The salvation of the world according to ACIM depends on the crux of all its teaching and learning, namely the “reversal of your thinking”. Students of the Course can engage themselves in this central spirituality, following daily one of the 365 lessons of the Workbook which is included in ACIM. In the first part, the lessons aim at undoing our present way of seeing things. This is called atonement, meaning the correction or undoing of errors. In the second part, the Workbook aims at the acquisition of true vision. Illusory perception is approached with forgiveness. As sin/separation can be seen as the mother of illusions, forgiveness “is the home of miracles”. True

105 T-5.II.3 (69); T-5.I.5 (68); see also: 5.III.5 (72f): “I have said before that the Holy Spirit is God’s answer to the ego… The Holy Spirit has the task of undoing what the ego has made”.
106 see ACIM, Clarification of Terms I.5-6 (75): Wrong-mindedness is the mindset of the ego, making “illusions, perceiving sin, justifying anger, seeing guilt, disease and death as real”. On the level of right-mindedness one “listens to the Holy Spirit, forgives the world, and through Christ’s vision sees the real world”. On this level, miracles occur and we return to seeing reality as it genuinely is and never changed. Finally, one last step is required, to be taken for you by God Himself, in order to reach the final bliss of “the One-mindedness of the Christ Mind, Whose Will is one with God’s”. At this point all miracles have happened, all separation is reversed and “time and illusions end together”.
107 T-5.II.1 (69).
108 T-3.III.6 (36); for the other way around, see III.2 (35): All difficulties stem from the fact that you do not recognize yourself, your brother or God.
109 See Wapnick, Glossary-index, 96: Heaven is described as “the non-dualistic world of knowledge wherein dwell God and His creation in the perfect unity of His Will and spirit”.
110 Cf. Glaudemans, Nachtblauwe Boek: the little book contains the narration, Glaudemans recited at the presentation of the Dutch translation of the Course (Nijmegen 11/14/1999): a parable about a prince stealing a precious book from his father, and then leaving his father’s house. In the end, returning home after many adventures and deceptions, it turns out that he had only left the kingly palace in his ego-mind. In reality, he had been sitting on the stairs near the front door all the time, trapped in wicked but illusory ego fantasies about his father’s favourite book, thinking that his father loved the book more than he loved him, the son. Finally coming to his senses, it dawns upon him that he had never left his Father really and that his father has never stopped loving him.
111 W-pl.20.1 (31).
112 The first part (pl) of the Workbook for Students runs from lessons 1 – 220, the second part, pII, from 221 - 360. The introduction to the second part ends with an exposition on: 1. What is Forgiveness? (W-pII. Introduction.1 (391)); then lesson 221 follows.
114 W-pII.(after lesson 340) 13(What is a miracle?).3 (463)
vision means acknowledging your basic reality as part of God and thus as being holy. As God, being only Love, is your Strength and your Source, you cannot see apart from Him. Therefore, true vision implies actively seeing peace instead of the illusions of anger, hostility or attack that we normally see. The miracle involved consists in the transformation of your unloving perceptions and thoughts into peace and blessing. A miracle, then, is a “correction” in awareness. It does “not create, nor really change at all”. It inverts perception, making it open to the truth, in light of which neither defence nor counterattack, but only “forgiveness [is] seen as justified”. Miracles happen when you realize that

under all the senseless thoughts and mad ideas with which you have cluttered up your mind are the thoughts that you thought with God in the beginning. They are there in your mind now, completely unchanged. … Here is your mind joined with the Mind of God. Here are your thoughts one with His …; approach it as you would an altar dedicated in Heaven to God the Father and to God the Son.

You may think that you have removed yourself far away from God. But down under petty causes of presumed hostility, the treasure lies of close proximity to God. The original error has been that we have started thinking in illusions as if we were actually separated from God. Thus, we have quit thinking with God or, even stronger, we have turned away from the basic reality that “God is the Mind with which I think”. However, believing that it is possible to really counteract God’s Will is believing that an “impossible choice” is open to you.

Closely linked with the eternal and indelible unity with God, is the equally unchanging and inviolable wholeness of the Sonship of which you are a part together with all fellow humans. You may “believe in error or incompleteness” with respect to any part of the Sonship, but this, too, is an impossible possibility. It is “believing in the existence of nothingness” which is an error in need of correction (Atonement). 

And on the basis of atonement, as the undoing of erroneous perception, miracles occur. This can be illustrated with the miracle of forgiveness, which happens upon the instigation of the Holy Spirit, e.g., in the case of the (illusory) experience of enmity.

When a brother behaves insanely, you can heal him only by perceiving the sanity in him. If you perceive his errors and accept them, you are accepting yours. If you want to give yours over to the Holy Spirit, you must do this with his (T.9.III.5). Atonement is for all, because it is the way to undo the belief that anything is for you alone. To forgive is to overlook … (T.9.IV.1). Atonement is a lesson in sharing, which is given you because you have forgotten how to do it. The Holy Spirit merely reminds you of the natural use of your abilities. By re-interpreting the ability to attack into the ability to share, He translates what you have made into what God created (T.9.IV.3).

116 W: respectively, less. 35; less. 171-180; less. 42-43; less. 34.
117 W-pII.(after less.340)13(What is a miracle?).1-2; page 463
118 W-pl.45.7-8 (72).
119 Resp. W-pl.45 (71); T.7.X.4 (124).
120 T.2.VII.6 (29). The Course follows a rather straightforward line or argument emphasizing that “God has only one Son”. This means that if “all His creations are His Sons, everyone must be an integral part of the whole Sonship. The Sonship in its oneness transcends the sum of its parts. However, this is obscured as long as any of its parts is missing”.

97
We are reminded of the distinction between making vs. creation, projection versus extension (4.1.c). One is what the ego does: making illusions, projecting fear on to others and feeling the need to defend itself against attack. Creation, on the other hand, was explained as an extension of love and spirit. Encompassing all being, love and spirit, God created you “by extending Himself as you”.121 This means that, as extensions of Him, we can only go on extending ourselves as He did. Creating like Him is “to share the perfect Love He shares with you”.122 The Holy Spirit now calls us back to our original and natural ability of co-creating with God. He teaches us, when affronted, not to counterattack which would involve projecting and enlarging fear and anger. Instead, the Holy Spirit restores our most basic potential to co-create with God, which is nothing else than extending and sharing love in place of letting yourself be entangled in the ‘unreality’ of hate. When affronted, it is precisely the extension and sharing of love that forms the positive part of the miracle of forgiveness, and that starts with overlooking what is perceived by the ego as an attack.

The regular ego way of ‘forgiving’ someone for his/her enmity or aggression is most often through our first objectifying the act clearly as a real offense and only then deciding to overlook it, mostly on certain conditions being first fulfilled, like the expression of regret, indemnification etc. But according to the Course, this ‘regular’ usage of forgiveness is begging the question. Why would you overlook that which you first have made real? Once you have made it real and big, you “cannot overlook it” anymore. Forgiveness as prompted through the Holy Spirit “lies simply in looking beyond error from the beginning”. In this way you hold seeming elements of attack, hate or fear as “unreal for you”.123 If the Course is steering away from one thing, it is from victimizing ourselves. Being children of God “we need no defence because we are created unassailable”. Neither wish nor fear of attack has any meaning. Defencelessness as a deliberate attitude is no sign of weakness but of our innate strength. It cannot be attacked as it mirrors the “recognition of the Christ in you” as perfect as “the Christ in your brother”.124 As He “is changeless in your brother and in you”, it follows that both of you are part of the one and undivided Sonship. Forgiveness, then, in any case, is “the only sane response”.125

4.4 Inventory of Findings

Similar to the parallel section in the paragraph on Jane Roberts, I will collect the results, firstly with respect to the theological questions directly concerning the perspective on sin (4.4.1 Four questions), secondly, concerning the four aspects of the esoteric or anti-apologetic yardstick (4.4.2 Four anti-apologetic benchmarks). The scores will be included in the inventory table and used to take stock of the findings, after all three sources of New Age religion are explored (§ 6). In Part Four they will be brought into the dialogue, together with the findings with Barth and Tillich, for the final evaluation and discussion (§ 10).

121 T-7.I.5 (105).
122 T-7.I.6 (105).
124 W-pI.153.9 (278); 153.6 (277); and T-30.VIII.5 (598).
125 T-30.VI.2 (593).
4.4.1 Four questions

(1) Divine-human unity? (+)

What I have describe as the material ontological aspect of reality, implies that in ACIM the Sonship or Kingdom of God is seen as the holistic unity of all spirit-oriented minds, including God and his whole and unseparated creation (4.1.b). Therefore, divine-human unity is as obvious in ACIM as any all underlying presupposition can be. Actually, it forms the essence of all ACIM’s monistic and explicitly non-dual teachings.

(2) Denial of original sin, especially of the element of non posse? (+) (‒)

In one respect, ACIM is clear in its denial of sin, both original and actual. Regarding our genuine and unchangeable reality as part of the Sonship (4.1.d), sin must be considered as the mother of all illusions proceeding from the original error (4.2.d). Actually, any thought of separation between God and only one of “extensions” or “sons” is likewise deemed completely illusory (4.2.b). Therefore, on the one hand following this emic confession, I will insert a plus (yes) to the present question. However, the exploration reveals on the other hand a remarkable and unmistakable anxiety with respect to sin, witness the belief in sin being associated with the devil (4.2.b). Although sin and divine-human separation is entirely illusory, the belief in sin is considered as a serious error in the Course. It is deemed destructive and in opposition to God (4.2.e). Hypothetically realized sin in the sense of a real divine-human separation would be irreparable according to the Course. It would even involve a mutual non posse to reach one another, hanging over both the (divine) spirit and the ego (4.2.d). This would make the ego (which is my own made self) and God’s self for ever irreconcilable. But actually, and ontologically, in the ACIM perspective the ego-self, like sin, is an illusion which must be reversed. Through the miracle of atonement, the ego-self can be made undone: it then simply no longer is. From an etic standpoint, however, one may very well object to this nullification of the outer person into a mere illusion. From the observer’s perspective, it seems logical to shortcut the ACIM reasoning, and say: stating that the only option for the ego - as mere illusion - is to be deleted (undone, reversed), comes down to saying that the individual human ego person is trapped in a total non posse to realize him/herself in whatever way. The result is that while (original) sin is adamantly denied, non posse is simultaneously implied. Therefore, from the observer’s standpoint, I add a minus to the plus given above.

(3) Denial of all evil? (+) (-)

Like sin is considered to be illusory, so are the collateral phenomena usually connected with it, such as natural evil, or suffering from illness (see 4.2-introductory words and 4.2.a). All evil is met with emic denial and this denial, too, is accompanied by unmistakable stress. Thus, the author of the Course feels the need to warn us that if you take e.g. the evil of sickness seriously, you make it real to you. Apparently, although all ideas of evil are as illusory as are sin and the ego, a belief in sin or any other form of evil can still be felt as a serious threat. Therefore, I will answer the present question too with an emic plus or yes, while adding a minus signifying my etic assessment of this denial.
(4) Denial of actual sin? (+) (‒)

What has been said above with respect to the denial of original sin (2), and the denial of all evil (3), is likewise relevant with respect to actual sin or separation (see 4.2.b). Although assumed forms of actual sin are denied and declared illusory, they still need to be atoned for, meaning the replacement of someone’s assumed insanity through actively perceiving sanity and love instead. This, too, evokes etic doubts whether the denial is indeed a genuine denial or, nolens volens a form of (either knowingly or unknowingly) ‘whistling in the dark’.

4.4.2 Four anti-apologetic benchmarks

Following the same procedure as in the parallel section above, I will start with defining the polemic impetus of each benchmark according to the anti-apologetic argument; and then carry out the assessment.

(a) Co-eternity? (+)

In contrast to ‘creation from nothing’, co-eternity can imply two things: firstly, the adoption of a second eternal principle next to God, in which both are seen as either corroborating with (Aristotelism) or irreconcilably battling against each other (forms of Gnostic dualism). Or, secondly, co-eternity stands for ontological unity, especially in case of the divine-human relationship (Neo-platonism). This second possibility is most visible in emanative systems that profess the direct procession of the human soul from God.

The ACiM-cosmology is a clear example of co-eternity in the last variety mentioned. This follows, firstly, from its strictly monistic nature, described as the material ontological aspect (4.1.b). The only one and true reality is the holistic unity of love called the Sonship or Kingdom of God. Ontological unity between the human and the divine is, secondly, implied in the axiom of the changelessness of genuine reality (4.1.d). Given this demand, creation can never result in something ontologically new. And this, finally, matches perfectly with the ACiM-definition of creation as sharing or extension of love which is actually a form of emanation: God extended himself as you (4.1.c). Actually, compared to the doctrine of ‘creation from nothing’ and its anti-apologetic interpretation, one can hardly imagine a system more contrarious than the ACiM-cosmology. According to the Course there is no essential qualitative distinction between God and his creation, there is no divine-human opposition, separation, or dualism whatsoever. Rather, and basically, there is and always has been only one (capitalized, divine) Self, fully integrated in the Sonship or Kingdom of God. Thus, there is divine-human co-eternity in the most wholesome way thinkable. And all perception or experience of one’s ego-self as in whatever way separated or even opposed to ultimate unity is entirely illusory.

(b) Pursuit of direct gnosis? (±)

In a strictly monistic cosmology one might expect that divine-human co-eternity and unity stand for a natural human potential on par with the divine and, as can similarly be assumed, unhindered direct gnosis. But there are two opposing qualifications. On the one hand, the Course states clearly that “the oneness of the Creator and the creation is your wholeness, your sanity and limitless power” (4.1.b) which is likely to include direct spiritual knowledge. On the other hand, we have enmeshed ourselves in
ego illusions. By consequence, direct gnosis – called true vision or the memory of an “ancient hymn” (4.1.b) - is no longer actual to us as egos. Communication with God ever remains, according to the Course, but this must now be mediated through the Holy Spirit designated as our “Guide in choosing” (4.3.b). The reason for this is that the real ‘me’ is obscured or blinded by my illusory ‘me’, the illusory ego.126

Thus a twofold answer is given in ACiM to the question whether direct gnosis is part of human being or not. Given the unity and wholeness in the Sonship, humans have a potential for direct gnosis which is unchangeably real. Only this potential is no longer actual to the (illusory) ego-person. What is left of it is like an indelible capacity to sing, but how do I sing a forgotten song? Actual human existence is built up by the ego perception of divorce and distance and separation which are the very troublemakers to direct knowledge. The ego perception of separation (together with all implicates of opposition, fear and enmity) is actual but no genuine reality. In the ACiM-perspective it is nothing but illusion.

This means that ontologically, our genuinely unbroken unity with God is stated by the Course as indelibly real, while de facto, as actual ego-persons, we have no unity with nor direct gnosis of God whatsoever. Therefore, I will import a plus/minus into the inventory table which points to emic ambivalence. I note already that this plus/minus distinction between genuine theological-ontological reality, on the one hand, and actual illusory existence, on the other, has parallels in both Barth (7.3.1.a, b) and Tillich (8.2.1.a).

(c) The denial or dissolution of the individual soul? (+)

The relevant point in the assumedly heretic denial of the immortal soul is not so much immortality but rather the element of individuality. The soul stands for having a centre of self, a personal substance upholding one’s continuity and accountability as a human being. Having a soul is closely associated with spiritual identity and integrity, with remaining the recognizable person you are through all the toils and lucks of life and beyond.

Emphasizing the non-reality of me as ego – which is done time and again in ACiM – comes very close to the denial of me as individual person. Humans are identified as inalienable parts of the holistic Kingdom of God – in which there is only one unchangeable and sharing brotherhood, the non-dual unity of communal Sonship. The Course has little eye for the ideal of being an individual human person. In fact, the idea of separated personhood is seen as erroneous and illusory. Individuality of independent human beings in distinction from God as well as from other members of the Sonship (4.2.b, c) is no target to pursue. The idea of becoming an individual and autonomous person is rather a cause of anxiety, e.g., when the ego is called a “fearful thought”.127 (see further in § 6)

It seems quite coherent with this problematic view on individual ego-personhood that the idea of the individual soul is left unused in ACiM (4.2.b). The immortal soul plays no role whatsoever to describe our genuine identity as Sons of God, nor to refer

126 T-5.II.5: When you [namely as ego, ffo] chose to leave Him he gave you a Voice to speak for Him, because He could no longer share His knowledge with you without hindrance. Direct communication was broken because you had made another voice.

127 T-5.V.3 (77): “The ego is the part of the mind that believes in division … The ego is quite literally a fearful thought”.

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to our eternally real being as integral part of the undivided Sonship. Given the axiom
that reality is changeless, the difficulty cannot lie in the element of immortality. More
likely, the problem is individual personhood. When humans have, or rather, are an
individual soul, then the suggestion of division and separation is inevitable. Clear-
ly, emphasizing the immortal vigour of the individual human soul, would spoil the
Course’s essential tenet of everlasting, non-dual oneness. This must be the reason why
the notion of the soul, though not explicitly denied, is intentionally ignored. The result
is that individual personhood is evaded which I take as its denial.

(d) The denial of a personal trans-mundane Creator God? (+)

The predication ‘trans-mundane’ serves as ontological expression of the ultimate
qualitative distinction between the Creator and his creation. In traditional-orthodox
perspective, the originally peaceful divine-human relationship changed into stress
and antagonism with the fall into sin, witness the opening stories in the bible. The
naive-friendly interaction between God and his beloved human beings turned into
separation and downright opposition on the human side, both towards God and as
humans among each other.

If taken in the specific sense of unbridgeable divine-human separation or oppo-
sition, the word trans-mundane stands in flat contradiction to the non-dual monism
of ACiM. However, if trans-mundane is taken in its literally figurative sense of ‘beyond-
this-world’, we can say that according to ACiM not only God, the Creator is seen as
trans-mundane, but God together with all his creations. Basically, the ACiM perspec-
tive is deliberately a-cosmic, since the entire outer world is seen as illusory. The only
genuine reality is the non-dual unity of God and all his “sons”, integrated in the Son-
ship or Kingdom of God. With respect to the relationship Creator-creation at large, we
can say that ACiM envisions God together with his Kingdom or Sonship (containing
the Creator together with all his creations/extension) as entirely trans-mundane as
related to the outer physical world, whereat it must be added that the latter is seen as
no more than the illusory non-reality of ego projection.

But if we focus on the divine-human relationship in particular, then the relation-
ship is seen in terms of oneness and unity. Basically, the ACiM vision of the relation-
ship between God and any human being in general, is hardly different from traditional
Christology and its perspective on the unity between God the Father and (the only
son) Jesus Christ. In ACiM, the only true answer to the question ‘what are you?’, is
that you are and have always been a beloved son of God who never left his father
(4.2.c) which, if applied to Jesus would do as quite healthy a Christology.

With respect to the possible personhood of God, it must be said that the Course
nowhere explicitly opposes the idea of God as a person. Actually, the biblical symbol-
isim and personal imagery (like Father and son, King and Kingdom, etc.) are largely
retained and actively employed. But nowhere does God appear in ACiM as a distinct
person, standing over against human beings in a dual relationship. For such a re-
ligious relationship a minimum of distance or separation between the believer and
God is required. And precisely this requirement seems to be categorically impossible
to combine with the ACiM conviction that “the belief in separation is the ‘devil’”
(4.2.b). God is a spiritual environment, a spiritual milieu in which one is destined to
live, rather than a person one has to relate to. It appears that the benchmark ‘personal
trans-mundane God’ can be denied as well as affirmed, with respect to both predications. I will therefore enter a plus-minus in the inventory table.

Two points should be taken along for further clarification, namely that of individual personhood and the element of stress hovering over the denials of separation, sin, evil, ego and body, all declared to be both illusory and fearful (see § 6). Now, we turn to the third New Age source to be studied: Matthew Fox.
§ 5. Matthew Fox (1940 - )

Right from the playful start of his writing career in the early 1970s, Matthew Fox has been advocating for transformation of official theology and religious experience. Nothing less than a paradigm change was at stake in the book that made him known: *Original Blessing, A Primer in Creation Spirituality* (1983). It is a frontal attack on the Augustinian doctrine of original sin and the fall/redemption tradition that, according to Fox, emerged in its wake. In place of a religious preoccupation with sin, he advocated for quite an other “*Spirituality*” that he sees as “oldest and deepest tradition of the West.”

Timothy James Fox, as he was originally named, was born and raised in a catholic family in the mid-west of the USA, in Madison, Wisconsin. In his teens, he developed polio and could not walk for two years before regaining strength in both his legs. Fox would later consider this as his first, mystical lesson against unthinking gratuity. The mystic “does not take for granted even a breath – especially a breath.” At the age of sixteen, Tolstoi’s *War and Peace* “blew my soul right open”. Strongly appealed to the question of social justice and eager for spiritual investigation and reflection, Fox decided some years later to join the Dominicans. In the 1960s he became an intent follower and supporter of Pope Paul John XXIII and the developments of the Second Vatican Council. With his training and education as a monk, Fox became highly interested in the American civil rights movement and the anti-war movement. Although the noviciate curriculum did comprise mystical elements, like vegetarianism, fasting, celibacy, chanting, Fox was eager for further reflection and spiritual deepening. There was only little attention for genuine mystics that will become omnipresent in Fox’s later work, as e.g., his favoured Meister Eckhart who had also been a Dominican. The fundamental issue became the relationship between spirituality and social justice.

After his solemn vows, Fox was allowed to study in Paris where he became much inspired by Père M.-D. Chenu O.P. (1895-1990). From him he derived the notion of “creation spirituality” as well as its having a tradition. In his auto-biographical *Confessions* (1996) Fox will observe that, in the encounter with this creation centred tradition “my entire life would gain a focus and a direction that I had never had before”. For his dissertation Fox studied all the editions of *Time Magazine* 1958, to discover

1 Fox, *Becoming a Musical, Mystical Bear* (1972).
3 The boy Matthew, as Fox will later observe, became “overwhelmed with gratitude to the Universe for something I’d taken for granted for the twelve years when my legs had worked”, see Fox & Sheldrake, *Natural Grace, Dialogues*, 1. Both authors introduce themselves with some auto-biographical notes, Fox 1-7.
4 See Fox, *Confessions*, 26, 27: “It was to John XXIII and his vision that I gladly made solemn vows …”, “committing myself to [his] spirit and vision for a church that reached out to others”.
5 *Natural Grace*, 3; also: *Confessions*, 39: Fox recounts how Bob Dylan’s song *The Times They Are A-Changin* united the awareness in his soul that “work in the culture” would become equally important as “work in the soul. … contemplation and action … mysticism and prophecy”; also *Confessions*, 69: about what becomes most important to Fox: the “question of questions: how do I relate spirituality to culture, prayer to social justice, politics to mysticism?”.
6 See for his time in Paris, *Confessions*, 61-86. Marie-Dominique Chenu stood on the blacklist of the Vatican for his support to the so-called worker-priests and never got really rehabilitated.
7 *Confessions*, 69; see also *Natural Grace*, 3, where Fox observes that Chenu was an inspiration to many, honouring him as the “grandfather of liberation theology”
that the religion section of the Magazine predominantly covered issues of “institutional religion – buildings, bishops and so on”. Those interested in the spirituality of “authentic religion” could better turn to sections of art, culture, book reviews or cinema. One of his conclusions was that, separated from institutional religion, “people very often are leading lives of living religion … without knowing it.” He discovered that there is a great distance between official religion and living spirituality; between “prophetic help for the oppressed and ideological support for vested interests”. What is needed, according to Fox, is “as much action as thinking”. He therefore aspires for what he sees as “the liberation theology mode of reflection based on praxis”.

Back in the USA in the 1970s, Fox becomes involved in women’s theology, gay rights and the ecological movement. Fitting in with New Age developments, he turns away from traditional, Western models of education, rejecting them as patriarchal and rational, “only about the left brain”. In order to offer an alternative, he starts the Institute of Culture and Creation Spirituality (ICCS) in Chicago. After some pioneering years he moves his institute to California in 1983 under the wings of Holy Names College in Oakland. In 1996 this led to the independent University of Creation Spirituality (UCS), with a curriculum focused on the integration of heart and head (left and right brain), using various teaching practices on many subject matters, including “bodywork, native spiritualities, the new science” as well as “art and meditation along with intellectual work”.

After the publication of *Original Blessing* (1983), Fox came under investigation by the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith. For a year (1989) he was prohibited from teaching and then ordered to return to Chicago. As moving back would ruin his ICCS, He refused and this lead to his removal from the Dominican order in 1993. Since then, he considers himself as a “post-denominational priest in a post-denominational era” even though he was soon welcomed within the Anglican Episcopal...

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8 Confessions, 69, 77, 80.
9 Confessions, 80; Fox also noticed “how glibly American industry and advertisers were using religious language to carry out their ideological convictions” (o.c., 77).
10 Fox, Religion USA, 431, cited in: Confessions, 80.
11 Confessions, 80. Fox will later present his creation spirituality (*Creation Spirituality: Liberating Gifts for the Peoples of the Earth* (1991)) as “liberation theology for first world peoples”. With respect to this liberation process in the West, Fox predicts (in 1971) “that artists will prove to be the ‘staunchest allies’…” (Confessions, 80).
12 Natural Grace, 6. See also a review by Milissa Hoard (2000), describing the staff of UCS as “a unique gathering of teachers from the world’s wisdom traditions, science, the arts, techno-culture, business and indigenous spiritualities”, with “a certified masseuse, a Zen Buddhist and a woman called Starhawk, who describes herself as a witch”. Fox’s UCS offers specialities like “art classes, yoga, tai chi, spiritual formation, science and religious combinations, opportunity to work with the community, and how-to instructions for creating your own rave-ritual” (www.religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/creation_spirituality.html (04/19/01). In 2005 the name was changed into Wisdom University and the management put in the hands of a new president. The spirit and soul of UCS were not maintained which led Fox to leave. Since then, he has taught at Stanford University, Vancouver School of Theology and Unity Village (www.matthewfox.org/about-matthew-fox/univ-of-creation-spirituality/(04/06/13). See also his own site: www.matthewfox.org/matthew-fox.
13 Confessions, 212; thus, Fox underwent the same fate as liberation theologian Leonardo Boff in Brasil, leaving office in 1992; Eugen Drewermann, silenced by his Bishop; and Hans Küng, prohibited from lecturing in 1979. Fox did never forget his ultimate opponent, Joseph Ratzinger, the later and in the meantime retired pope, witness the publication of *The Popes War: Why Ratzinger’s secret crusade has imperilled the Church and how it can be saved* 2011.
Church. The struggles with his mother church and monastery order only strengthened him in his attitude of “deep ecumenism”, accepting and seeking spirituality from all sources.

Now more than ever we have to strip down religions to their essence, which is not religion but spirituality. Spiritual experience must include worship that awakens people instead of bores them, that empowers them, that brings out the gifts of the community, that heals and brings the healers back to the centre of the community, healers such as artists, justice-makers, and others. This is the agenda for the third millennium.

The actors for this agenda as well as the sources for inspiration can be found anywhere and are certainly not bound to the confines of the Church. According to Fox, the entire cosmos is filled and blessed with the divine Dabhar. This pan-en-theistic vision is outlined in Original Blessing (1983, cited as OB); and further elaborated in The Coming of the Cosmic Christ (1988, CCC). The divine immanence correlates with human imagination and creativity, described by Fox in Creativity: Where the Divine and the Human meet (2002, CDH). Using these works, together with his autobiography (Confessions) and the dialogue with Rupert Sheldrake (Natural Grace (1996)), I will outline Fox’s basic ideas on the three main elements of my investigation (Cosmology, Hamartiology, Human Potential).

To end up this introduction, some words must be spilled on Fox’s relationship with the New Age movement. His attitude towards the New Age is ambivalent. On the one hand, he shares many themes with New Age religion and spirituality, adopting “New Age mystics” like David Spangler, Jean Huston and Marilyn Ferguson in his family tree of Creation-centred Spirituality. His moving over from Chicago to the West coast was because California was the place to be, where “Science and Mysticism were dialoguing”. Without adopting the term New Age, Fox acknowledged that transformation was in the air in the early 1980s, speaking of growing numbers of spiritual seekers finding “in themselves … the potential of the divine” and the recovery of faith in “our creativity and in the artist within each of us”. He observed a rekindling of the “spark of hope and vision, of adventure and blessing” which may lead to the “rebirth of civilization … in these last days of patriarchal competition and war-consciousness”. On the other hand, like other first hour figures, he soon became critical about “certain trends” in the New Age movement which are “all conscious-

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14 Natural Grace, 6. See the subtitle of his Confessions: The Making of a Postdenominational Priest.
15 Fox, Natural Grace, 6; also: Confessions, 287: “I believe in the wisdom found in all world religions and in the spiritual power found in such prayer forms as sweat lodges and vision quests and chanting. The Spirit is not labelled Christian or Muslim or Jewish or Buddhist. The Spirit blows through us all, wherever it wills. Just like the wind”.
16 According to the Spirituality and Health Magazine this book was praised as one of the “best spiritual books of 2002”.
17 Rupert Sheldrake is a representative of New Age Science (2.2.1.)
18 OB, 314.
19 Confessions, 129. Simultaneously, Fox shows awareness of a “dark side to being in California [which] is the accusation of ‘New Age’ or ‘flaky’”, Conf. 157.
20 OB, 183, 187; see also an interview in 1993 (http://www.levity.com/mavericks/fox.htm); according to Fox the Piscean Age (which is the “age of dualism, of two fish swimming in the opposite direction”) is coming to an end and we are now heading for the Age of Aquarius, which he characterizes as “post-denominational”.
ness and no conscience; all mysticism and no prophecy ... “.21 Still, the strong and implicit link between Fox and the New Age movement can be clearly exemplified with his University of Creation Spirituality. Its experiential course and aims, as well as the wide variety of methods and contents, can serve as perfect example of Marilyn Ferguson’s “New paradigm of learning” described and advocated by her in: *Aquarian Conspiracy*22. As both a New Ager and a theologian, Fox is a most interesting partner in dialogue.

5.1 Cosmology

With his presentation of creation spirituality, Fox is aiming at a paradigm change with respect to both mainstream theology and science. A new “organicist paradigm” is needed “that holds value and fact together”.23 In *Original Blessing* he argues that the required innovation will consist in

reconnecting science, mysticism, art and social transformation []. This book is a challenge as much to let go of Newton’s and Descartes’s influence on education as it is to let go of Augustine’s influence on religion. Left-brain-itis is a lethal disease that today has quite literally the power to destroy all the earth. The right-brain’s contribution of feeling and connection-making, of mysticism and cosmic delight, of darkness and sensuousness needs to be taught and appreciated.24

Whereas Fritjov Capra and others, turned East to find the new paradigm, Fox is convinced that the Western tradition of creation spirituality is perfectly fit to facilitate the longed for, holistic kind of science and religion.25 He lets this tradition start with the Jahwist (the J Source) in the bible and suggests a “Family Tree of Creation-Centred Spirituality”, running from J to the Psalms, the Wisdom books, many of the prophets, Jesus and much of the New Testament; to Irenaeus, as the first Christian theologian in the West, and then all the way further to the present.26 In the introductory paragraph to

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21 CCC, 141: “… all past life experience, angelic encounters, untold bliss, and no critique of injustice or acknowledgment of the suffering and death”. For similar criticism, see above 2.1.1.a. concerning Fritjov Capra..

As regards reincarnation, Fox once observed that this might provide for a link between East and West religiously, if connected with the Western notion of “Communion of Saints” and the Purgatory, the latter not aimed at punishment but at learning (see http://www.levity.com/mavericks/fox.htm). Fox shows no interest in “channelling”, although alternative communications are not foreign to him. He seems to take some pleasure in pointing to his faithful dog Tristan as his most important “spiritual director”, his “spirit-guide” during the seventeen years of his doggy life. Even afterwards, in dreams, Tristan continues to appear and share his wisdom. Fox: “I include him among a pantheon of spirits that have assisted me over the years” (*Confessions*, 109, 156).


23 *OB*, 15; Fox refers to a letter he received from “a physicist” who also wrote that “the central sickness of our world is precisely the split between religious wisdom and scientific knowledge and power”. The identity of this physicist is not revealed but the perspective is common sense in the New Age.

24 *OB*, 24.

25 *OB*, 15.

26 *OB*, 11; Fox’s “Family tree” (see *OB*, 307-315) contains a large number of historical names he considers as representatives of Creation centred Spirituality: not only theologians and mystics of all ages; from the twentieth century (A.Schweitzer, M.D.Chenu, Gerhard von Rad, Rosemary Ruether, Edward Schillebeeckx), but also composers, artists, poets, writers and prophets of social change (like M.L.King, Gandhi, Thoreau, Dom Helder Camara, Dag Hammarskjöld) and philosophers (Whitehead, Teilhard, Capra ...) as well as feminists and humanistic psychologists. Fox also counts among his creation centred allies many non-Christian, spiritual traditions (of Tao, Native Americans or Africans,
the New Age, I have presented Fox as an exponent of holism of the type of Universal Interrelatedness. Supporters of this type are predominantly interested in the “present nature and constitution” of the universe, not so much in its origin. (2.2.1.b). With Fox the keyword is *creation* which he does not see as something of the past. Instead, he states that “creation is as ongoing as we are; as vast as our experience of it. It is in us and we in it; it is us and far beyond us.”

27 Apparently, “creation” is close to a principle of divine immanence.

The first thing that is required, according to Fox, in order to experience both realized creation as well as the permeating principle, is that we regain a spirituality of living cosmology. This is the subject of the first subsection (5.1.a. Living Cosmology). Then, I will turn to the principle of creation that is addressed by Fox under various names. In Original Blessing (1983) it is identified as the original Word, the divine Dabhar, framed as the creative energy of God in all creation (5.1.b. The Word of God – creative energy). Some years later and without any essential alteration, the divine Dabhar is christened, so to speak, into the Cosmic Christ which becomes the dominant concept in the Foxian cosmology since. I will pursue the question ‘how dominant?’ by examining whether the notion “cosmic” in combination with Christ, is meant as a predicate or as a concept of being (c. The Cosmic Christ – cosmic as predicate or as concept of being). The extent to which “cosmic” attached to Christ is meant as an ontological concept of being, gives an indication of the perspective on the divine-cosmic relationship which is the concern of the fourth subsection (d. The relationship God – cosmos: pan-en-theism). Finally, I will give some clues on how Fox’s central notion fits in with the tradition of Christian theology (e. The Cosmic Christ and theological tradition).

5.1.a. Living Cosmology

In his book *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ (CCC)*, Fox recounts a disquieting dream about “the devastation our planet is currently undergoing”. He calls this devastation “matricide”, meaning the killing of the mother, also including the so called ‘motherly’ aspects of humanity. 28 As the subtitle indicates, Fox is playing the apostle of doom for a positive aim: *The Healing of Mother Earth and the Birth of a Global Renaissance*. In order to reach this we must recover a lively interaction with the cosmos which he defines as living cosmology:

*The holy trinity of science (knowledge of creation), mysticism (experiential union with creation and its unnameable mysteries), and art (expression of our awe at creation) is what constitute a living cosmology. Every theologian must embark on these pathways and awaken them within if the theological enterprise is to accomplish its task in our time.*

With “living cosmology” Fox has in mind, on the one hand, a philosophy of life,
informed by science including theology. This results in a cosmology which is tantamount to a perspective on the world. On the other hand, living cosmology includes an attentive, mystical concentration on the world or cosmos aimed at spiritual unity. And thirdly involved is an artistic interaction with the world or cosmos, leading to all possible kinds of creative expression. The mystical and artistic elements signify what is meant with ‘living’ cosmology implying a spiritual and playful way of life.

My main concern in the present part (5.1) is with the first component mentioned. The central element in Fox’s cosmology as a perspective on the world is that the entire cosmos and especially humans are permeated by divinity. This divine immanence has been designated by him, firstly, as “word of God” (b) and later primarily as “Cosmic Christ” (c).

5.1.b. The Word of God – Creative energy

One of the criticisms Fox has vented concerning Western theology is that it has produced a “theology of the word of God [that] has practically killed the word of God”. It is not clear to what extent he is hinting, here, at the theology of Karl Barth whose perspective will concern us in Part Three. What is clear, according to Fox in the early 1980s, is that the original creative dynamics of the “word” of God, as the translation of the Hebrew word Dabhar, is practically lost under the “left-brain hegemony” in Western culture, in face of an overkill of words, used technically for utilitarian purposes. To recapture the creative power of the divine word, we “must return to the pre-word times of original creation” when the word was tantamount to “the divine creative energy”. This pre-word situation is further connected by Fox with primordial wisdom as the initiation of God’s creations which brings him to the conclusion that “all of creation contains the living wisdom and word of God”. By this he also means that divine wisdom worked creatively long before humans came into being and human words came to be spoken. We should respect “the many billions of years of ongoing creation that also constitute God’s talking”. The effect of this long-standing ‘creation as creative process’, is creation as the result of this process which is nature. Creation in the latter sense, as the resulting world or cosmos, is also “a source of truth and of revelation”, it is a “book about God” parallel to the traditional word of God, the bible.

But Von Rad, according to Fox, went an astonishing step further, when stating that “this mysterious order in the world not only addresses man; it also loves him”. Re-

30 OB, 36
31 See OB, 36f.: “Advertisers, newspapers, presidential speeches, paperback books, voluminous libraries, and now word processors are all busy changing the meaning of the word ‘word’ and in a sense cheapening it ….”.
32 Also designated as “the creative energy of God”, OB, 37.
33 OB, 37; Fox mentions especially the biblical song of Wisdom (Prov. 8) and refers to Gerhard von Rad, Wisdom in Israel. Fox: “Gerhard von Rad … defines wisdom or the word behind creation as “primeval world order, as the mystery behind creation of the world’”. Apparently, Fox identifies here word (dabhar) and wisdom (chokmah), see also OB, 122.
34 OB, 37.
35 OB, 37f. For the widespread image of creation as a second “book about God” next to the bible, Fox refers to his beloved Meister Eckhart as well as to the “geologian” Thomas Berry calling nature itself “the primary scripture”.
36 OB, 38; reference to Von Rad, G., Wisdom in Israel, Abingdon Press, 1974, 166. Fox also quotes Von Rad, 175: “The idea of a testimony emanating from creation is attested to only in Israel”.
lating to a similar suggestion of a loving - and thus almost personalized – cosmos in a Romantic poem of Beaudelaire. Fox concludes that Israel’s wisdom tradition offers “a unique trust in creation as a source of divine revelation”. Thus, the mysteries of the world are “all mysteries of God” that are due to one flow, one divine energy, one divine word in the sense of one creative energy flowing through all things, all time, all space. We are part of that flow and we need to listen to it rather than to assume arrogantly that our puny words are the only words of God. (…) Wherever existence is loved for its own sake and its own beauty, that is, as “the glory of existence”, there you have creation-centred spirituality happening.

Thus God or his creative energy is vividly present in all of reality like a “great underground river that no one can dam up” (Eckhart). Moreover, this understanding of the all permeating word of God, does not only uncover the “true meaning” of the opening chapter of the bible, with respect to God’s creative and effective “let there be light” and so on. The word of the prophets, too, calling for “new creation and the letting go of death-filled ways of living” is tapping from the very same “flow of the one creative energy”. And next to creation and prophecy, Fox sees the creative-energetic Dabhar also as the driving force in the incarnation, in Jesus of Nazareth, as well as in others. God’s creative energy cannot be imprisoned or locked up for long, still it “wishes to be incarnate in us” in order that we participate in “healing, celebrating, and co-creating”. According to Fox this is tantamount to the Christian belief “that the primeval wisdom, the word-before-words, the creative energy of God has become one of us”. The resulting spirituality of a “creation centred” person is that one is intent on experiencing the divine in and through the concrete reality of creation. For such a person, says Fox, “creation itself constitutes the primary sacrament”. For now, I conclude that in the cosmology of Fox, the Creator and creation are closely connected in such a way that the divine word or Dabhar is identified as the creative energy of God that is present in humans as well as in all the world. Fox seems to take the divine Word as sort of DNA supplying all things with the necessary information; and at the same time as the spirit representing the creative drive. Thus, divine creativity permeates the entire cosmos and makes all creation into “living nature”. It makes the cosmos with its “mysterious order” even into “unique living being” that is

37 “We walk through forests of physical things / that are also spiritual things / that look on us with affectionate looks”, OB, 38.
38 OB, 38f.
39 OB, 39: the prophetic word “breaks out when this flow is dammed up by greed, corruption, boredom, or injustice. For Dabhar will not be kept down; God’s energy will not be aborted; creation will take place”.
40 OB, 40; according to Fox, we should translate the New Testament along “lines that are more Hebraic” in order that “a new power emerges from the Christ story”; as an example he translates the opening of John’s Gospel as follows: “In the beginning was the Creative Energy: The Creative Energy was with God and the Creative Energy was God …. “.
41 OB, 40.
42 “Living nature” is one of the characteristics of Hermetic or Renaissance Esotericism as described by Faivre, see above 2.1.2.c. According to Hanegraaff, this creative “force of divinity … ‘enlivens’ nature”, therefore the concept of living nature “is most properly described as a form of pan-en-theism”, see New Age religion, 398.
43 See OB, 70, Fox quoting his teacher Chenu on medieval, pan-en-theistic cosmology: “The whole penetrates each of its parts; it is one universe; God conceived it as a unique, living being, and its intelligible
characterized as benevolent, loving, or looking upon us with affection. Thus, the traditional religious image of a personal God (theism), is replaced by the pan-en-theist picture of the (divinely enchanted) creation or cosmos which can aptly be designated as cosmo-theism. As Fox aspires for spirituality that is creation centred, his theological focus is clearly swerving away from the traditional extramundane Creator God. His new focus on the living cosmos of which we are a part is reflected in his re-baptising the dynamic-creative ‘word of God’ as the Cosmic Christ.

5.1.c. The Cosmic Christ – cosmic as predicate or as concept of being

In The Coming of the Cosmic Christ (CCC, 1988), Fox is renaming the creative energy of God. From now on, the image of the Cosmic Christ becomes the basic concept of his cosmology. In the prologue of CCC it is stated that

This book is about the sacred and our response to it: reverence. The sacred what? The sacred everything. The sacred creation: stars, galaxies, whales, soil, water, trees, humans, thoughts, bodies images. The holy omnipresence of the Divine One in all things. The Western term for this image of God present in all things is “the Cosmic Christ”.

The adoption of a more explicitly Christian term does not mean that Fox takes distance to the previous concept, nor to similar one’s in other religious traditions. Thus, he can state that Buddhism also has a “well-developed tradition of the Cosmic Christ or the ‘Buddha nature’ in all things”. Within the Christian tradition Fox recognizes other equivalent terms as well. Biblical terms to designate the sacred human self are the “inner person”, the “kingdom/queendom of God …among you”, the divine “One who is with us” (Emmanuel). Anyone’s own human self is, according to Fox, a “unique mirror of divinity”, an “image of God”. With respect to later tradition, Fox is an enthusiastic student of mediaeval mystics with Meister Eckhart as his favourite. Eckhart has likened the inner person with “the soil in which God has sown his likeness and image and in which he sows the good seed, the roots of all wisdom, all skills, all virtues, all goodness - the seed of the divine nature”. And Eckhart has equated the latter seed with “God’s son, the Word of God”. From this, Fox immediately concludes: “Thus, for Eckhart, the true self or inner person is nothing less than the Cosmic Christ inside each of us”. And just like the divine Dabhar is not only present in humans but

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44 As equivalent to pan-en-theism, cosmo-theism (see §10.4.b.iii) perfectly mirrors Fox’ idea of Creation Spirituality, see below, esp. 5.1.d).
45 Fox took up the term from Teilhard. For a history of the term, see: Lyons, J.A., The Cosmic Christ in Origen and Teilhard de Chardin, Oxford University Press: Oxford 1982. See also below, 5.1.e.
46 CCC, 8.
47 CCC, 231f. Fox refers approvingly to the Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh who is also identifying notions as “true self”, “source of wisdom and compassion”, or the Buddha inside yourself” (232).
48 CCC, 64: Respectively, Paul in Romans 7,22 (έσω άνθρωπος); Luke 17,21; Matth.1,23 (Emmanuel).
49 CCC, 64.
51 CCC, 65. Thus Fox is equating the “soil” with the “seed”; and he further identifies the seed of creation
in all of nature, so is the Cosmic Christ. Therefore, as final characteristic of truly authentic mysticism, Fox points to “a growing facility to experience the Cosmic Christ in all things”.

The alteration of concept from Dabhar to Cosmic Christ harbours no criticism against the former but is part of the paradigm shift Fox has in mind for Western Christianity. As will be exposed in the next section, a main objection made by Fox against the spirituality concentrating on fall/redemption is that it is conspicuously anthropocentric (5.2.c). Anthropocentrism took on new forms and became dominant in the Enlightenment. What came was “an anthropocentric era of culture, education and religion” which had “no need of a Cosmic Christ” but instead did concentrate, theologically, on the quest for the historical Jesus. But according to Fox, “if the earth is to survive” in the third millennium, then the great issue must be the “quest for the Cosmic Christ”. Such a renewal of theology must “be grounded in … the historical Jesus” but a critical “dialectic is in order, a dance between time (Jesus) and space (Christ); between the personal and the cosmic; between the prophetic and the mystical”. But according to Fox, it must be “a dance away from anthropocentrism”.

In order to recover the hidden, but “all-pervading role” of the Cosmic Christ in the Scriptures and in tradition, Fox has distinguished six indicators, one of which is the title “Lord”. The Kyrios means “the Ruler of the universe” which is a “cosmological title”. The implication, according to Fox is that, any time when Jesus is referred to as Lord (kurios), this is a “confession in Jesus as Cosmic Christ”.

The reason for Fox to rename Jesus, the Christ in a standard way as Cosmic Christ is to some extent strategic. It has to do with his deep environmental and ecological concern, voiced in the subtitle of CCC: The healing of Mother Earth and the Birth of a Global Renaissance. The predication of Christ as cosmic is a clear criticism against all anthropocentrism in religious matters, especially with respect to salvation. The narrowing idea of personal or private salvation is considered by Fox as “utterly obso-

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52 CCC, 66; Fox, again, refers approvingly to Eckhart who has observed that “to such a person God shines in all things” (BR, 223) and that, according to your genuine mystical aptitude “all things become for you nothing but God” (BR, 249).
53 CCC, 77.
54 CCC, 78; Fox mentions criticism made by Krister Stendahl with respect to Rudolf Bultmann: “We [Christians] happen to be more interested in ourselves than in God or in the fate of his creation … Rudolf Bultmann’s whole theological enterprise has one great mistake from which all others emanate: he takes for granted that basically the centre of gravity – the centre from which all interpretation springs – is anthropology, the doctrine of man”. (At least as regards the criticism against anthropocentricity, there is agreement among Fox and Barth, although they proceed in opposite directions, Fox searching God in creation, Barth only in Christ.
55 CCC, 78.
56 CCC, 79.
57 CCC, 107; the six indicators of “cosmology” or “Cosmic Christ” are: 1. Angels; 2. Lord (Kyrios); 3. Clouds (in connection with theophanies); 4. Glory (doxa); 5. Wilderness and mountains (also in connection with theophanies); 6. Evil (cosmological forces, “powers and principalities”). Anytime when one or more of these indicators are present, then you may think: “cosmology”, “Cosmic Christ”.
58 CCC,106f.: With respect to the end of Peter’s address on Pentecost (Acts 2:36: “... that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ”), Fox observes straightforwardly: “The confession of faith with which Peter ends his address is a confession in Jesus as Cosmic Christ”. Also 105: For Fox “the risen Lord is the Cosmic Christ”.
59 With respect to the need for healing Mother Earth, see CCC, 11ff, Part 1: “A dream, ‘your Mother (Earth) is dying’ - a Crucifixion Story for Our Times”.

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lete”. Instead, salvation must be “universal …, a healing of all the cosmos’ pain, or it is not salvation at all”.

Accordingly, and to emphasize the universal character of the messianic mission, the true nature and essence of the historical Jesus is emphasized as the *Cosmic Christ*. This leads to a further question whether the attribute “cosmic” is only meant as a predicate, or in a more fundamental sense as a concept of being. If only meant as one of the many predicates that have been attributed to Jesus Christ, the word cosmic is just highlighting a certain function and emphasizing the broad scope and intention of the existence of Jesus. But Fox also evokes the impression that cosmic is meant more basically and ontologically as concept of being.

### 5.1.d. The relationship God-cosmos: pan-en-theism

The question of the ontological standing of the ‘cosmic’ element of Christ has ground in common, on the one hand, with the classic doctrine of the Person of Christ, especially regarding the divine and the human nature that are supposed to be joined in the *unio personalis* Jesus Christ. On the other hand, the ontological question brings us to Fox’s perspective on the divine-cosmic relationship; and to the question to what extent God and cosmos are identified by Fox which, then, is his variety of divine-cosmic coeternity.

With hindsight to the Chalcedonic formulation of ‘one Person in two natures’ it was Teilhard de Chardin who ventured a “third nature” of Christ that was “neither human nor divine but cosmic”. Fox sees no problem in simply identifying Teilhard’s “third nature” with his own preferred term Cosmic Christ and concludes that this takes us beyond Chalcedon (451) into “a third realm” which is “cosmic”. Leaving aside what exactly Teilhard may have meant, the question of interest is what Fox himself has in mind when concentrating traditional Christology around the notion *cosmic*. The answer follows from his perspective on the divine-cosmic relationship implying a near-by identification of creation (the cosmos) and the Creator. From John the Scot, Fox takes approvingly that God and creation are intimately tied together and combined as “universe”. Moreover, within this universal whole, a silent transmission of characteristics seems to take place, so that the traditionally personal God is sided by

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60 *CCC*, 151; also: “Salvation is about God becoming ‘all in all’, Paul tells us (1 Cor.15,28). The hymns to the Cosmic Christ … as well as the overwhelming interest in cosmology … in the Gospels all attest to the cosmic sense of redemption and healing”. Fox has discussed as examples of the Cosmic Christ hymns: Philippians 2, 1-24; Romans 8,14-39; Colossians 1,15-20; Ephesians 1,3-14; Hebrews 1,1-4; John 1,1-18; and Revelations (*CCC*, 87-99).

61 See *CCC*, 145: “The first … Christians … understood the Christ event, the experience of the Christ in the person of Jesus, as a deeply cosmic happening. They believed that Jesus accomplished nothing less than a cosmic healing, a cosmic redemption”.

62 *CCC*, 77. One of the many quotes, put by Fox at the beginning of his Part III, about the intended shift of focus from the Historical Jesus to the Cosmic Christ, is derived from Teilhard: “This third nature of Christ (neither human nor divine, but cosmic) – has not noticeable attracted the explicit attention of the faithful or of theologians” (cited by Fox from: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The heart of the Matter*, Hartcourt Brace Jovanovich: New York 1978, 93.

63 *CCC*, 83; Fox actually states that this supposed third nature “takes us beyond the fourth-century conciliar definitions of Christ’s human and divine natures”. Apparently, he means to include the fifth-century decision of Chalcedon.

64 That ‘Cosmic Christ’ theology is certainly not absent in Christian tradition will be observed below in 5.1.e.

65 Compare *OB*, 69, where Fox is citing John the Scot: “By universe I mean God and creation”.

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a cosmos, and that the latter is also endowed with person-like features. Especially a statement of his former teacher Chenu, saying that the universe was conceived by God as “a unique living being” evoked spiritual enthusiasm in Fox:

Imagine – the cosmos is alive, a unique living being, and it is a pleasure - a source of delight! The universe itself is sacramental, “filled with God”. Dabhar is effective in its creativity and utters the cosmos as its ongoing work of art. To explore the cosmos is to explore god.66

Clearly, when Fox speaks of Creation spirituality, it is indeed creation (world, cosmos) that is not only the object and aim of this spirituality but also its source. Actually, Fox comes close to identifying God and the cosmos, not only in loving friendliness (5.1.b) but also in demanding righteousness. This last point can be exemplified with his comment on an ecological disaster in Michigan, due to the illegal dumping of PCB’s and poisonous dioxins.

“As often as the elements are stained through the mishandling of humans, God nevertheless cleanses them through the sufferings and pains of those same human creatures”. The cosmos keeps a ledger – not God; and the cosmic order will not in the long run tolerate human greed, human indifference … or human injustice. 67.

God cleanses …; the cosmos keeps a ledger; and the cosmic order does not tolerate … It is difficult to say where the one ends and the other begins68. God - especially according to his hidden or dark side designated by Fox as the “Godhead” - and the cosmos are closely connected, on the verge of identification.69 Nevertheless, Fox firmly denies full equation as in pantheism. In fact, he is equally opposed to pantheism, as to the contrasting perspective of theism. Evading both, he takes the middle course of pan-en-theism.

66 OB, 69f.
67 OB, 71; In the first part Fox is citing Hildegard, in the second, he continues with his remarkable interpretation substituting the cosmos in place of God (“the cosmos keeps a ledger – not God”). See also OB, 228 where God, creating and birthing as mother and as creator, is more or less identified with the cosmos. Compare: “… the cosmos is not yet done with its work … The cosmos is still birthing … ” with, some lines further: “Theology promises that the Creator, who is not yet done with her work, desires additional delight still for the cosmos”. God as mother and mother nature appear as indistinguishable twins.
68 I recall the position of Schleiermacher (§1.2.1) who maintained the distinction between divine or Absolute Causality and the natural order, while simultaneously stating that both (God and the Universe) are “equated … in comprehension (dem Umfange nach ... gleichgestzt)”, Christliche Glaube, §51, main thesis. See also Hasler, Beherrschte Natur, 147, stating that having the same range (Gleichumfähiglichkeit) does not mean identity of God and Nature.
69 See Fox’s conversation with Rupert Sheldrake in: Natural Grace, 44f., where Fox comments on the two faces of God, one light, the other dark. The latter implies the mysterious or dark side of God which Fox calls the “godhead”, seemingly equivalent to the theological notion of Deus in se. Fox: “The Godhead is the God of mystery. … is pure being. The image I have is a great big cosmic mama in whose lap all things exist. … When we die, no one will ask us where we have been or what we’ve been doing. There is no judgement because in the Godhead there’s such total unity that no one has missed us. … In the godhead there is total silence; it is the abyss”. Hardly intending discursive strictness, these lines do evoke the image of narrow nearness between the Creator and creation. As soon as Fox imagines the dark or hind side of God, the image comes to his mind of the immeasurable cosmos. In the universe they all seem to merge silently together: the godhead, the pure being and the great cosmic lap. The resulting spirituality is a feeling of intimate divine-cosmic holism.
Pantheism, which is a declared heresy because it robs God of transcendence, states that ‘everything is God and God is everything’. Pan-en-theism, on the other hand, is altogether orthodox and very fit for orthopraxis as well, for it slips in the little Greek word *en* and thus means ‘God is in everything and everything is in God’. This experience of the presence of God in our depth and of Dabhar in all the blessings and the sufferings of life is a mystical understanding of God. Pan-en-theism … is not theistic because it does not relate to God as subject or object, but neither is it pantheistic. Pan-en-theism is a way of seeing the world sacramentally …

Thus, Fox is advocating for a “healthy” mystical understanding of God as in pan-en-theism. Divinity is not ‘out there’ but rather inside, ‘in here’. The all permeating divine Dabhar, re-baptized as Cosmic Christ, entails a form of ‘co-eternity’, as well as some kind of ‘direct gnosis’, namely mysticism based on the pan-en-theistic adoption that “all things [are] in God and God in all things”. Through the all permeating divine immanence, Fox can say that the created world itself is the “primary sacrament” (5.1.b). This means that meeting with a thing or a person in reality is simultaneously meeting with the divine. Divine immanence clearly implies a narrow divine-cosmic closeness, and it probably implies a form of sanctification of all things and persons. But does it also imply ontological identification with God? – which Fox both seems to deny and suggest. This brings us to the question how the notion Cosmic Christ can be linked with theological tradition, since the discussion about the divine-cosmic or divine-human relationship has a remarkable parallel in the early debates between Lutherans and Calvinists concerning the connection of the divine and human nature in Christ. These discussions had bearing on the theological understanding of sacrament, in particular the mode and measure in which Jesus Christ was believed to be present in or with the Holy Supper. In fact, these discussions between two strands of Reformation theology also reveal a possible link or convergence with Fox’s core notion Cosmic Christ.

5.1.e. Cosmic Christ and Theological Tradition

When the world or cosmos is identified as “primary sacrament” the question that is prompted – though perhaps more from a Protestant than from a Catholic inspiration – is to what extent the world then is actually identified with the divine. Is there transcending Deity beyond the sacramental cosmos? Or are God and the universe actually co-extensive and interchangeable? as Fox, similar to Schleiermacher, seems to imply, and which clearly touches the anti-apologetic and similar criticism. The age-old question is: are the Creator and his creation to be identified? Or are they two substances or natures that remain to be distinguished?

A similar, largely equivalent question can be met in the early Lutheran-Reformed dispute concerning the relationship between the human and divine nature of the God-man Jesus Christ. With regard to the Lord’s supper and the doctrine of consubstantiation, Lutherans claimed that after the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity in Jesus, that is, after the hypostatic union, the divine and the human nature in Jesus Christ are inseparably joined together. They

70 *OB*, 90.

71 *CCC*, 57; Fox observes further that he knows of many “serious spiritual seekers” designating themselves as “atheist” because “pan-en-theism or mysticism” has never been an option for them in “a culture where theistic relations to divinity are celebrated at the expense of mystical or pan-en-theistic ones”.

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held that a full interchange of the properties (*communicatio idiomatum*) takes place between
the two natures, implying that the Lord according to his humanity is as omnipresent as he is as
divine Logos. In this way, Lutherans could maintain the Lord’s twofold presence in, with, and
under the elements of the holy supper, both spiritually as God and also bodily according to his
humanity. The reformed Protestants, however, did not agree to this near identification of both
natures. They held that after Ascension the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ is no longer
on earth but in heaven.\textsuperscript{72} Moreover, Calvin had emphasized that even after the incarnation,
Christ, according to his divine nature is still acting in certain ways: *apart* from the assumed
humanity ("*extra carnem*").\textsuperscript{73} Lutheran polemicists disqualified this as the so called *extra Calvinisticum*. Although both parties agreed with longstanding tradition that the eternal son, the
*logos a-sarkos*, was primordially present as creation-mediator at the genesis of the World, and
has continued to fill heaven and earth providentially ever since, the controverted point was that
according to Calvin he kept on doing so even after the incarnation: separated from the human
nature. The dispute had only bearing on the state of affairs after the incarnation of the eternal
Son in the humanity of Jesus.\textsuperscript{74}

Calvin’s insistence on the continuing reality and work of the divine logos *outside*
the flesh – i.e. apart from the God-man Jesus Christ - is relevant with respect to the
Foxian perspective on two points, one critical, the other supportive. In critical sense,
it provides us with a Christological parallel to the anti-apologetic viewpoint that the
Creator should be kept in clear distinction from the created. The suggestion implied
in Calvin’s *extra* is that even with respect to the God-man Jesus as the Christ: God
and world, the Creator and his creation, the divine and the human nature may not be
identified.

But there is also an aspect of the *extra Calvinisticum* which is much more con-
verging with Fox’s core notion *Cosmic Christ*. In a general sense, the idea that ‘Christ’
transcends ‘Jesus’ can be seen as supporting Fox’s condemnation of anthropocen-
trism. And more importantly, there is an undeniable measure of convergence between
Calvin’s *extra* and Fox’s central divine principle: between, on the one hand, the traditional
notion of the continuing work of the eternal Word outside the flesh, both after
the event of Jesus as the Christ as eternally before; and on the other, the Cosmic Christ
as promoted by Fox. Clearly, when the work of the eternal Son (the second person in
the Trinity, the eternal Word, Christ) is not limited to His incarnation in Jesus’ humanity
but extended to all creation, His active role comes close to the one implied by the

\textsuperscript{72} Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 205, 206 (*Als in een Spiegel*, 190, 191)
\textsuperscript{73} Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 43-45; 215 (46f; 200).
\textsuperscript{74} See also: McCormack, “Grace and Being”, in: Webster, (ed.), *Cambridge Com-
panion*, 92-110, esp. 95. According to McCormack, the motif behind the Luther-
an standpoint was to fence off the danger of Nestorian separation of the two natures (95).
Both McCormack and Van der Kooi discuss the so called *extra Calvinisticum* not with regard to Lord’s
supper as such, or for the sake of the concerning struggles in themselves. Van der Kooi’s study is
about “knowing God” for which he explores and draws into dialogue: Calvin and Barth. The impli-
cation of Calvin’s *extra* is that “the eternal son does not coincide perfectly with the incarnate Word,
and knowledge of God does not therefore coincide perfectly with knowledge of Jesus Christ as the
incarnate word” (Van der Kooi, 45, (47)). This implication of the *extra Calvinisticum* is clearly at odds
with Barth’s strong focus on Jesus Christ, the *logos ensarkos*, as the sole and revealed (not hidden!)
fountainhead for knowledge of God. McCormack shows in his article that Barth criticised Calvin’s
speculation about enduring activity of a *Logos asarkos* for the same reason, namely that it suggest the
reality of divine operation which cannot be known through God’s presence and action as incarnate
Word. The erroneous idea of knowing God’s action apart from his revelation in Jesus Christ (en-sarkos)
led, according to Barth, to disastrous consequences, in particular in Calvin’s doctrine of predestination
(McCormack, 95f).
notion Cosmic Christ. And it is in line with this that Fox identified the Cosmic Christ with the divine Word or the figure of the primordial Wisdom that worked with God from the very beginning of creation and until now (5.1.b). Concerning the work of the (cosmic) Christ as logos asarkos in service of all creation - both before and after the incarnation - it is relevant to note that Calvin was by no means original.

This is observed by Van der Kooi who points to the longstanding communis opinio in the history of dogmatic development, implying that Christ as “the Son, as the eternal Word … is involved with the world as mediator in creation and as sustainer”. Actually, forms of cosmic Christology are as old as the New Testament, witness the prologue of St. John, certain elements in St. Paul, in Revelations, and most elaborately in the so called Pseudo Pauline letters to the Ephesians and Colossians. Cosmic Christology, according to Van Kooten, concerns “the interrelationship between God, Christ and the cosmos”, especially when “Christ is accorded a cosmic role in God’s dealings with the cosmos”,76 The general thesis made by Van Kooten might very well upset an anti-apologetic mind like Thomasius’, stating that “Graeco-Roman cosmology is closely intertwined with the soteriological question of man’s salvation” both in authentic Pauline letters as in the pseudo-epigraphic ones.77 With respect to the introductory prayer in the letter to the Colossians, Van Kooten concludes that the extensive picture of the “pre-eminence of Christ in the generation of the cosmos seems only fully understandable in the context of contemporary Middle Platonist thought”, when Plato’s demiurge had become a sort of second God.78 Apparently, the pagan-philosophic contamination of the Gospel had already started in the minds of the holy scribes themselves.

A major post-apostolic witness of an integrated approach to cosmology and Christology is Irenaeus, described by Steenberg in a detailed examination: Irenaeus on Creation. The Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption. According to Steenberg, Irenaeus treated creation as intrinsically being part of Christology, in which all parts aim at the soteriological fulfillment of creation, in particular of the human being as the meaning and end of all creation.79 For Irenaeus, as Steenberg explains, the beginning of humanity should not be situated in “… Adam, but in the calling forth of the cosmos out of the void”. And it is precisely “here that the salvation of humankind begins”. On many places in his work, Irenaeus has made clear that a genuine eschatological vision can only be formulated together with such a protology, and that both are part of “the completion of the one creative movement of God.” This one movement covers the entire human ‘economy’, and all stages of the creation-salvation of humankind from the formation of the cosmos until the fulfilment in the eternal kingdom. In this entire process, the divine Father as the creative source is never without his “two hands”, namely “the Word and Wisdom who are the realizing agents of the Father’s will”.80

75 Van der Kooi, As in a Mirror, 46 (44), also noting that exegesis in the ancient Church already interpreted the Old Testament appearances of the angel of the Lord as referring to the eternal Word, the Second one of Trinity.
76 Van Kooten, Cosmic Christology, 1.
77 Van Kooten, Cosmic Christology, 4.
78 Van Kooten, Cosmic Christology, 207; 126: in works after Plato’s Timaeus “the Demiurg of the Cosmos is no longer the highest God …; rather the function of Creator seems increasingly to be fulfilled by a second God”.
79 Steenberg, Irenaeus on Creation, 6: “When Irenaeus speaks of creation, he does so through the lens of human growth and salvation that he sees as its aim. Cosmology is bound up in soteriology …”. Thus, as the aim of creation in the Irenaean vision is the growth and fulfilment of the human being, so cosmology is part of soteriology, and thus of Christology. By consequence “the whole thrust of creation become[s], in a word, anthropocentric”.
80 Steenberg, Irenaeus on Creation, 7f.
81 Steenberg, Irenaeus on Creation, 103f.
Thus for Irenaeus, the “Christian vision is not contained fully in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ …”. The Church does not only confess “that Christ lived and acted, but that he lives and acts continually, that in due time the Son will yield up his work to the Father”.  

I conclude that Irenaean Cosmic Christology as presented by Steenberg, embodies an obvious element of convergence but also one of strong divergence with the teachings of Fox. They share the view that Christ represents the mediating and creative hand of God in all times, and in all parts of the entire cosmos. Obviously, God’s dealings with reality appear in final clarity and fulness in the incarnate Christ. Even then, from the very first primordial act of creation, till its ultimate conclusion in eternity, it is at all stages of cosmic and human development that God has worked and works through the (cosmic) Christ, his eternal Word.

There is, however, also a great divergence between the Irenaean and Foxian viewpoint, especially with respect to the rank or position of the human being. For Irenaeus the one creative work of God through Christ is entirely centred upon the human being and his salvation. But precisely this idea amounts in the eyes of Fox to anthropocentrism which he qualifies as the sin behind sin (5.2.c, e). Nevertheless, Fox counted Irenaeus among Creation-centred theologians. Especially in Original Blessing, Irenaeus is praised by him for his creation-minded spirituality and his emphasis on human development, growth, and even theopoièsis.  

5.2 Hamartiology

The stronger “original blessing” is emphasized as the very beginning of all creation, the more the reality of evil becomes an ontological problem. This is illuminated in the dialogue between Fox and Sheldrake, I will relate to in the first subsection (a. Natural evil). Subsequently, I will discuss Fox’s perspective on sin or religious evil, which he does not distinguish from moral evil. I will describe the Foxian analysis of what the centrality of the doctrine of original sin has done to Christianity, especially to Western Christian religion and spiritual experience (b. Criticism on the fall/redemption tradition). Then I will describe the theological criticism Fox has articulated against the doctrine of original sin (c. Criticism on original sin – the doctrine as such). After his criticism, I will address Fox’s own alternative doctrine of sin in two steps, firstly, his own understanding of sin in general (d. Sin according to Fox, original and consequential); and, finally, the question as to whom or to what, sin according to him is an affront (e. Sin against who?).

5.2.a. Natural evil

According to Fox there is no genuine natural evil. Instead, he adopts a dialectic of dark and light which does not only occur in creation but is also present in the creator, in nature as well as in God. The picture that comes to his mind is that of “a great big cosmic mama in whose lap all things exist”. But in the eyes of Sheldrake, darkness is too soft an expression to cover serious and seemingly senseless forms of death and destruction. In the Christian bible and in many other philosophic and religious traditions “there is not only darkness on a cosmic scale, but evil”. Sheldrake sees his point ex-
emplified in the myth of the Fall of angels before creation or in the apocalyptic struggle of archangels in a super mundane realm.\textsuperscript{85} Fox, however, equates these mythical “angelic forces” with the “powers and principalities”\textsuperscript{86} that we have to resist, just like we must battle against the “shadow forces” that are proceeding from our collective, sinful past. Here he mentions concrete examples like the negative results of industry, racism, militarism, homophobia, which are all proceeding, not from nature but from human activity. What Fox is saying is that “Satan is not something out there; we’re all participating in potential satanic, demonic powers”. We can use our creativity either to express “divinity” or give way to the “demonic side to our creativity. What Fox is saying is that realized evil comes from human hands, not from nature itself.\textsuperscript{87}

Sheldrake is not convinced, and he refers to the hypothesis of the Big Bang, which is a model of severely counteracting forces. On the one hand there is a cosmic explosion implying an enormous separation of all things “from a primal unity into outward expansion” which is literally diabolical or throwing apart. On the other hand, the model contains an element of reunion, namely in “the unifying force of gravitation”. Thus, says Sheldrake, a polarity between destructive or separating forces (evil) and unifying forces (good) has been “right there from the beginning in our modern scientific worldview”.\textsuperscript{88} But Fox declines “calling that diabolical at all”. Instead, the “drawing apart of things” is simply a necessary element of evolution. Without the original Bang of separation, the world would never have come into being.\textsuperscript{89} With respect to nature, one cannot divide between good and evil, at most between “comfortable versus uncomfortable”. At first sight, an exploding volcano is obviously destructive and may cause much pain. But it also offers fresh soil and fertility to coming generations. The cosmos is not evil: “Mother Earth has a right to let her gas off, as we do. We shouldn’t be moralizing about it”.\textsuperscript{90} Light and darkness both belong to creation, according to Fox, and he refuses to call darkness evil.

Instead of demonizing darkness, we can better get acquainted with it. This is actually what Fox has described as the second path of creation spirituality, namely the via negativa. On this path one embarks on exploring the shadow sides of life with the intention of “befriending the darkness, letting go and letting be”.\textsuperscript{91}

The subtitle of \textit{OB} is: \textit{A Primer in Creation Spirituality Presented in Four Paths, Twenty-Six Themes, and Two Questions}. The first of the four paths is called the \textit{Via Positiva} (31-125) and aims at “befriending creation”, implying the exploration of the various riches, all the positive, light-oriented elements of creation. Along the \textit{Via Negativa} (127-172) the spiritual traveller is especially exploring and befriending, not battling, the uncomfortable and at first sight, negative elements of creation like pain, nothingness, darkness, silence. The \textit{Via Creativa} (173-244) con-

\textsuperscript{85} \textit{Natural Grace}, 47. Sheldrake refers to the Fall of Angels (2 Peter 2,4; Jude 6), the expulsion of Satan and the apocalyptic struggle between the archangel Michael and Satan (Revelation 12,7ff.).

\textsuperscript{86} Reference to Ephesians 6,12.

\textsuperscript{87} \textit{Natural Grace}, 48; Fox exemplifies his point with the species of the whales, that is fifty-six million years older than humankind. Yet, whales "do not find it necessary to invent nuclear weapons or tear down the rainforest" (48f).

\textsuperscript{88} \textit{Natural Grace}, 50.

\textsuperscript{89} \textit{Natural Grace}, 50. Fox refers to what he calls “the Eucharistic Law of the Universe: everything eats and gets eaten in some form or other”. The Supernova explosion or Big Bang “that birthed the elements of our bodies in its explosive and generous death (...) was a Eucharistic event”.

\textsuperscript{90} \textit{Natural Grace}, 51.

\textsuperscript{91} This is subtitle of path II, \textit{OB}, 127. References in the following intermezzo refer to \textit{OB}.
cerns the spirituality of “befriending creativity, befriending our divinity” and aims at becoming co-creators and contributing to creation. One of the themes along this third path, which made Fox suspect in the eyes of the Vatican, is: “God as Mother, God as Child: ourselves as Mothers of God and Birthers of God’s Son” (220-228). The fourth path is called the *Via Transformativa* (245-305). As “not all creativity is for the beautiful” our creativity itself is in need of “criticism and direction” (247). This path is about letting your creativity be transformed by compassion, celebration and, as Fox calls it, erotic justice.

With respect to the suffering which can be met on the *Via Negativa*, Fox emphasizes that it is not “the wages we pay for sin”. Instead, it “is built into the birth process of the entire cosmos”.

Illumining his perspective on evil, Fox refers to the distinction made by Whitehead between “tragic evil” and “gross evil”. While the latter type of evil is defined as only destructive, “tragic evil” allows for a “survival power in motive force” and can even “appeal to reserves of Beauty”. As such it is acceptable to Fox and not genuinely evil. He can loop upon “tragic evil” as “redemptive” by which he means that it is possibly “redeemed by beauty” that may come from it. Thus, Fox speaks approvingly about the milder form of evil as the inevitable dark side of all creative life. But he leaves “gross evil” out of account.

What results from nature cannot be evil, says Fox. The “only ugly thing …” he can imagine, is “human sin”.

5.2.b. CRITICISM ON THE FALL/REDEPTION TRADITION

The closing remark of the previous section makes clear that Fox does not deny the reality of sin. But he heavily objects to the dominating role the doctrine of (original) sin did receive in Western Christianity. The spirituality that came out of it is invariably designated by Fox as the fall/redemption tradition. Thus, an important part of the criticism on the doctrine of original sin is directed against its history of effects (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). His overall complaint is that the spirituality in this tradition rotates exclusively around the acknowledgement and repenting of sin and the craving for deliverance from it. Thus, it has created and promoted a strongly otherworldly or world denying attitude, leaving little space for the delight of the *Via Positiva* and the spontaneous enjoyment of life as it is. Instead, many aspects of natural human life came to be feared and suppressed.

Fall/redemption spirituality does not teach believers about the New Creation or creativity, about justice-making and social transformation, or about Eros, play, pleasure, and the God of delight. It fails to teach love of the earth or care for the cosmos, and it is so frightened of passion that it fails to listen to the impassioned pleas of the *anawim*, the little ones, of nature.

92 *OB*, 146. Fox further observes that “suffering has accompanied all the birthings of the universe right up to the labor pains … Some suffering – that which leads to birthing – can be a blessing” (147).

93 *OB*, 213, mentioning as example the Resurrection made possible through the crucifixion: “There is no Easter without a Good Friday”.

94 It seems that for Whitehead “gross evil” was a larger problem theologically, than it was an ontological or cosmological problem for Fox, see Oomen, *Doet God ertoe?*, 511: “Deze afstompende of destructieve vorm van lijden is … in de visie van Whitehead ... negatief te waarderen ... [getuige] zijn felle afwijzing van de traditionele theologie, die dit lijden tracht te rijmen met een almachtige God. In zekere zin komt heel zijn denken over God voort uit een poging dit lijden niet op rekening van God te hoeven schrijven”. But Fox seems to have lesser difficulty with ascribing evil to all-encompassing creation or nature (ffo).

95 See an interview with Fox, http://www.levity.com/mavericks/fox.htm, where he observes: “I think the only ugly thing is human sin. Nothing nature makes is ugly”.

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human history. The same fear of passion prevents it from helping lovers to celebrate their experiences as spiritual and mystical. This tradition has not proven friendly to artists or prophets or Native American peoples or women.96

The “original sin mentality” led people to “self-loathing and self-contempt” and to the awareness “that I came into the world despised, unwanted, ugly, and powerless”.97 Even if this negative spirituality will not have affected all people, Fox is convinced that ninety nine per cent of all Christians are familiar with the notion “original sin” whereas barely one percent have knowledge of “original blessing”. This has led to a “dangerous distortion of life and of biblical data”.98 With respect to the biblical foundation, Fox emphasizes that in the creation-centred spiritual tradition “the great event is not the Fall (always with a capital F) but the creative energy of the Word of God”. This tradition is not all about deliverance, instead, it emphasizes that “blessing is the word behind the word, the desire behind the creation”.99 He further refers to the theologian Herbert Haag who criticized the supposed biblical origin of the doctrine, especially the connotation of “hereditary sin” (Erbsünde) which is the German notion of original sin. Haag had written that the idea that we inherit sin from our ancestors and are sinners already when entering the world “is foreign to Holy Scripture”.100

All in one, the emphasis on sin has led to severe distortions of life and faith. Instead of “endeavouring to articulate the work of the Spirit in people”, traditional theology has often forced them into “a procrustean bed” telling people “what they ought to experience”.101 Especially those whose position is in some way vulnerable already, like women, gays, blacks, may have felt themselves all the more defenceless. Fox mentions a woman in her sixties saying: “I have always wondered what I was being redeemed from. But I was afraid to ask”.102 Apart from enforcing a low self-image onto people or even self-contempt, the negative picture of sin can also be projected onto others. Projection, according to Fox, comes from “an inner refusal to let oneself

96 OB, 11.
97 CCC, 29; also: OB, 50: “How much pain and how much sin have come about because of an exaggerated emphasis on the doctrine of original sin? What trust is lost in oneself, in one’s body, in the cosmos, when children are instructed that they came into the world as blotches on God’s creation?”. For similar criticism on the traditional doctrine of sin and its psychological effects on the person of the believer, see Schilder, Hulpeloos maar schuldig.
98 OB, 46.
99 See OB, 44; Fox refers to Claus Westermann (Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church, Fortress 1978) having said that the biblical God has two ways of dealing with humankind: by deliverance and by blessing.
100 OB, 47, citing Herbert Haag, Is Original Sin in the Scripture? According to Haag nowhere in the Old Testament is any question of original sin; and: “It is certainly not in chapters one to three of Genesis” (Haag, a.w., 19). One does become a sinner “only through his own individual and responsible action” (Haag, a.w., 107). Just like Fox, Haag was no friends with the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith. In the slipstream of the Second Vatican council, as observed by Hanns-Stephan Haas, many critical publications were published on the doctrine by catholic theologians. Among these was Herbert Haag who wrote some critical articles in the Theologische Quartalschrift (Tübingen) in the early 1970s. They were published under the title: “Die hartnäckige Erbsünde. Überlegungen zu einigen Neuerscheinungen”. Haag suggested that it was time to leave the “unselige[n] Konstruktion einer Erbsündelehre” behind (Th.Q. (1970), 453). The Vatican’s suspicion was further aroused because Haag saw the suspension of the doctrine of original sin as a test-case for the discussion on further issues, especially the authority and infallibility of the ecclesial, doctrinal office (Th.Q. (1971), 86), see Haas, Bekannte Sünde, 20ff.
101 OB, 22.
102 OB, 51.
be, to be with oneself”. Being “not at home with our deepest self” often leads to “projecting onto others our ways, our attitudes, our fears, our disappointments”. Especially fears in many varieties for those who are different “are sins … of projection”.

A spirituality that, as Fox sees it, is stamped by the fall/redemption tradition is basically world-rejecting. It seems to be teaching that ordinary human life as it is, takes place, as it were, below the ground, below the ‘surface level’, since we have all fallen down into sin. By comparison, the Creation centred spirituality as advocated by Fox, is positively world affirming. At least three of the four paths (Positiva, Creativa, and Transformativa) are about the experience of created life as a blessing which is above ‘surface level’; they are about praising, enjoying, developing and improving both world and self. Even the Via Negativa is about affirming or befriending the dark; accepting or at least “letting go” and “letting be” the aspects of life that form the dark side of life. Thus, Fox can state that we even “need to let sin be sin for a while” and “allow sin its rightful and even instructive place” in our lives. This sounds “very different from the fall/redemption approach to the Via Negativa”. According to Fox the latter is “filled with will power”, and with terms like “mortification”, meaning “to put to death” and “penances” and even “annihilation”. The spiritual aim is to climb out of the deep, “climbing” to the “top of the ladder”. It is remarkable that Fox, here in OB, intuitively hints at the imagery of the famous negro-spiritual We are climbing Jacob’s ladder. Later in his Confessions, this image of climbing Jacob’s ladder will occur to him as illustrative for fall/redemption spirituality. The original singers of the song were slaves on the Southern cotton fields. Their life took place, literally, below the ‘surface level’ which is spiritualized in the song in terms of the fall/redemption tradition. The path of faith is presented as a lifelong march of sinners wrestling...

103 OB, 160.
104 OB, 161: “the fear toward people of the other sex, … of a different sexual lifestyle, …of a different race or political system or language”.
105 With the idea of life at ground- or ‘surface level’, I have in mind a hypothetical neutral point of valuation of life which can best be explained as ‘in between’ with respect to the opposing attitudes of outspoken world-denial or other-worldliness on the one hand, and world-affirmation or this-worldliness on the other. According to the former, this life as such is below surface level: life is seen as basically evil, wrong, or in whatever way dis-eased and therefore in need of fundamental transformation or even total replacement. The ultimately real world will have to be an ‘other-world’ that comes from beyond the present one. In the opposite perspective of world-affirmation, the present world is positively located above surface level. The world is seen as fundamentally good which means at least that it harbours in itself the powers and potentials to be or at least develop into the great blessing it basically already is. To an excitedly world affirming person a seeming obstacle in life is never an evil but always a challenge. A misfortune is not a setback but an ‘unscheduled learning opportunity’. In a strongly this-worldly experience of life there is only Wow!
106 Life ends in salvation, which means along the ‘positive way’: celebrating existence, experiencing beauty and joy; practising love, and healing life from sin (OB, 120ff); along the ‘creative way’ it leads to: co-creativity with God (OB, 236); and along the ‘transformative way’ life is aimed at the enduring renewal of one’s own active existence through compassion and justice (OB, 299).
107 OB, 161.
108 OB, 155. The picture of fall/redemption spirituality that is drawn by Fox mostly resembles a sort of ‘spiritual warfare’. As example, he refers to a French preacher Bourdaloue from the eighteenth (!) century. Fox: “Bourdaloue, whose work was so popular that a collection of his sermons went through fifteen editions in his century alone, says the following: “The great advantage of religious profession is Christian abnegation. What is the Gospel if not a law of renunciation of oneself, death of oneself, a perpetual war against oneself?””.
109 OB, 161.
110 Confessions, 106f.
upwards, “climbing” and “serving” as “soldiers of the cross”. Apparently, present life in this world – as it actually was to the slaves – is only worth to climb away from, to leave behind for a better and totally other-world, high up to God who is remotely above. During a retreat with college students, Fox was offered a surprising alternative, when his co-leader had the group doing circle dances and singing a different text to the very tune of Jacob’s ladder, namely: “we are dancing Sara’s circle”. Fox was struck by “those contrasting words, dancing versus climbing” and became aware of “how different an energy” was released by bringing it into practice, dancing instead of climbing. The equation of “spiritual attainment” with climbing up could only add to the idea “as if God were away from the earth”. The image of climbing inevitably provokes a “ladder mentality as a spiritual archetype” leading to “hierarchies of all kind”. The image of the circle, however, “already contains the divine energy; it is pan-en-theism (God around), not theism (God as up)”.

I conclude that the main objection of Fox against what he calls “the fall-redemption tradition” concerns the spiritual effect namely, namely that it fails to encourage people to experience creation as a blessing. It has no eye for the presence of God in all reality. It does not acknowledge that created life as such is blessing existing above neutral or ‘surface level’. Instead, the fall/redemption doctrine teaches people to find themselves fallen down in a deep hole which is original sin. Thus, it promotes a religious experience resembling that of spiritual warfare against their actual existence. In this way, the fall/redemption tradition keeps people away from the lightness and blessedness of being. It prevents a creation centred spirituality, that is focused on creation in four affirmative ways - positiva, negativa, creativa, and transformativa. Even the negative or dark sides of life are to some extent welcomed.

5.2.c. CRITICISM ON ORIGINAL SIN – THE DOCTRINE AS SUCH

The basic objection made by Fox against the doctrine as such as well as against the central locus of original sin within Western theology, concerns the anthropocentrism that is implied. The doctrine and its conditioning role towards the gospel of salvation imply an “anthropomorphic preoccupation with sin” which entirely neglects the fact that creation – and the history of blessing therewith – is much older than the comparatively short history of humankind.

In religion we have been operating under the model that humanity and especially sinful humanity, was the centre of the spiritual universe. This is not so. The universe itself, blessed and graced, is the proper starting point for spirituality. Original blessing is prior to any sin, original or less than original. I do not consider this book to be a polemic against Augustine or the fall/redemption model of religion. Maybe it was necessary that humanity concentrate during a certain period on its fallenness. But the time has come to let anthropocentrism go and with it to let the preoccupation with human sinfulness give way to attention to divine grace.

111 Confessions, 106: “I remember watching these big, heavyset young men in their mountain boots dancing a minuet, and I realized once again how radical art is. Their spirit itself was transformed by the demands of the dance …”.

112 Confessions, 107.

113 OB, 46; also 19. According to Fox, the history of humanity (and human sin) is only four million years old whereas the universe goes back some twenty billion years.

114 OB, 26.
The focus on sin is interpreted by Fox as in itself a sin, namely that of anthropocentrism, in two ways. Firstly, it implies that we put ourselves as humans at the very centre of everything which goes at the expense of the cosmos. The second form of anthropocentrism caused by the focus on sin is the concentration on introspection\textsuperscript{115} and on the human soul, at the expense of the body. Although not intended as a polemic against Augustine, the bishop of Hippo is criticized more than once for “too much introspection, too much preoccupation with law, sin, and grace” which has contributed to the fact that Western Christianity “is cut off from the cosmos”.\textsuperscript{116} It has made us “cosmically sad, cosmically lonely, cosmically destructive”, the latter not only ecologically and militarily but even when playing or gaming.\textsuperscript{117} The introspective focus on the inner soul has further led to the trivialization of the body as only the “cage” to hold our soul “in check”. We have unlearnt to believe that “earthiness and sensuality and passions are a blessing” and have been put into “a hostile relationship with our very nature” as well as with “all of nature”.\textsuperscript{118} Underlying this attitude is a “dualistic mentality that treats other creatures in a subject/object fashion of manipulation and control”. It is the sin of dualism in the sense of “putting the ego-logical ahead of the ecological”.\textsuperscript{119} It is ironical that the doctrine of original sin through its limited focus on humankind and its lack of respect for the much larger pre-human cosmic reality, has actually contributed, says Fox, to “the very trivializing of sin” which, according to him, emerges from our “inability to grasp sins like geocide and ecocide and biocide of which the human race is fully capable”.\textsuperscript{120}

I conclude that the main objection, made by Fox, against the doctrine of original sin is its inherent anthropocentrism. The defect of anthropocentrism was aggravated through the introspective attention for the human soul. This led to undervaluation or even negation of the physical and bodily aspects, of the riches of non-human creation, and thus, of the blessing that is given in the entire \textit{cosmos}. The outcome of Fox’s analysis is especially noteworthy on two points. Firstly, the criticism against the doctrine of original sin as being \textit{anthropocentric} is remarkable because original sin has also, and primarily by Augustine himself, been designated as self-love (\textit{amor sui}) and also as human pride (\textit{superbia}), both of which, taken together come actually very close to personalized or individualized anthropocentrism. Also remarkable is, secondly, the objection made by Fox that the very focus on original sin has led to the trivialization of other forms of sin, namely of sin against the rest of creation. This calls for the question of Fox’s own understanding of sin which, apparently, includes moral evil and is not necessarily directed against God.

\textsuperscript{115} Fox makes a distinction between an \textit{inner} journey and an \textit{inward} journey. The former he deems “altogether healthy and necessary” as we quite naturally “take \textit{inner} journeys into ourselves, into our loved ones, into trees, into Mozart’s music, into death, into pain and suffering and injustice, ideally all the time”. When taking an “\textit{inward} journey” we only look into ourselves “for spiritual refreshment. It is introspection. There lies the death of cosmic spirituality, the death of \textit{cosmos}, and the excessive quest for personal salvation", \textit{OB}, 77. In Dutch language, an “\textit{inward}” attitude is called \textit{navelstaren} which is ‘indulgence in navel-gazing’.

\textsuperscript{116} \textit{OB}, 76; for criticism on Augustine’s focus on introspection see also: \textit{OB}, 213; 299; by consequence, Augustine did lack the “Cosmic Christ”, see \textit{CCC}, 78.

\textsuperscript{117} \textit{OB}, 77. Fox speaks of “cosmic violence” and gives the example (in 1983) of the commercial of “a man in suit and tie talking tranquilly of our need to buy an Atari game for adults and children alike in which we can “destroy entire planets””.

\textsuperscript{118} \textit{OB}, 77; 61.

\textsuperscript{119} \textit{OB}, 119; it is tantamount to the “sin of omitting Eros or love of life from our lives”.

\textsuperscript{120} \textit{OB}, 19.
5.2.d. Sin according to Fox, original and consequential

Although the creation centred tradition takes blessing as the origin of its religious experience, it does have an understanding of “original sin or the sin behind sin”. Anthropicentrism appears to be a phenomenon of a prior, underlying attitude of dualism. Dualism as candidate for the position of original sin appears most clearly on the *Via Positiva*, the first spiritual path (5.2.a). As opposed to the spontaneous exploration, valuation, and befriending of all the riches of creation, the original sin in the perspective of creation spirituality is “dualism”, “separation”. Fox also makes clear that creation spirituality itself has a dynamic which he calls “dialectical, as distinct from dualistic”. Dualism implies exclusive thinking in terms of either … or, whereas inclusive or “dialectical consciousness is about both/and thinking, both/and relationships”. Now, the most radical and far-reaching form of dualism concerns the human attitude and relationship towards nature. Most often, nature is treated as an opponent. The strong rejection of dualism, as attitude of distance or even hostility towards nature, is grounded by Fox in “the consciousness of pan-en-theism” while simultaneously illuminating his point with the observation that “we are nature seeing nature”. For Fox, these are two motivating arguments against dualism, one theological regarding the immanent divine, the other (nature-)philosophical concerning the common being of all creation/nature.

As concrete examples of dualism, Fox has identified subsequent sins appearing on all paths of creation-spirituality of which the variety of sin on the *Via Creativa* is most noteworthy. Sin against the *Via Creativa* can take two faces: it becomes manifest either as the misuse of creativity, or as its negation, that is, as the refusal to create. As regards the one face of sin, it occurred to Fox – when pondering some historical examples of extreme violence and injustice - that sin must be “more than a privation of good”. Instead sin is “the misuse of the greatest good of the universe, which is that image of God in humanity, our imaginations”. With respect to human creativity, Fox observes that in the human imagination “the divine and the demonic are very close together”. We are “capable of” both divinity and the demonic, says Fox, adding that “the deepest of all demonic activity is the use of our divine imagination to invent destruction”. Two basic forms of “misplaced imagination” are sadism and its counterpart masochism, both of which can lead to concrete sins at all levels of existence.

121 *OB*, 210.

122 *OB*, 210; 214: “Dualism and separation are the original sin, the sin behind sin …”; 49: “From Meister Eckhart to Mary Daly, the sin behind all sin is seen as dualism. Separation. Subject/object relationships. Fractures and fissures in our relationships. Take any sin: war, burglary, rape, thievery. Every such action is treating another as an object outside oneself. This is dualism”.

123 *OB*, 210; Fox refers to Frederick Turner who considered “the enduring opposition of man and nature” to be “the basic principle of Western civilization” and, presumably, as its basic defect.

124 *OB*, 210; that “we are nature seeing nature” Fox derives from Susan Griffin, “Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her”, Harper Colophon, 1978, which Fox describes as a book “based on the experience women have had in a basically dualistic and fall/redemption patriarchal society” (*OB*, 323).

125 Consistent with the spiritual aim of the *Via Negativa* which is befriending, letting be, and accepting the negative, dark and uncomfortable aspects of creation, sin against this path is described as “the refusal to let go, the refusal … to develop receptivity” (*OB*, 159), and even the refusal to let sin be sin and give it its “rightful and even instructive place” (*OB*, 161 – 5.2.b). Sin against the *Via Recreativa* is closely bordering on sin against the *Via Creativa* both of which I will now discuss in the main text.

126 *OB*, 231.
The misuse of imagination has consequences both to the sadist abusing his power-over, as to the masochist or victimized looser. As regards the former, the misuse of power robs the abuser of his own “inner life” as well as of his “sensitivity” to others. To the dupes enforced powerlessness “can lead to lassitude, self-negation, guilt and depression”, turning into masochism as “I can’tism”. The latter form of sin is characterized by Fox as “from the inside”. It is perhaps the most poignant and inveterate. It occurs when the sadist form of sin “from the outside”, is internalized. The sin of I can’tism is connected by Fox with acedia which is one of the classic capital sins. Acedia is the very opposite, the very negation of what above is identified as the “creative energy” or “image of God” in us, being “the greatest good” of “our imaginations”. Therefore, every liberation movement “is about the release of the artist within people” which is “our deepest self”.

The subjects of the two ‘faces’ of sin, the abuser as well as the looser, are both in need of the Via Transformativa. Sin against this need for transformation, then, is described as the “failure to live lives of transformation and of being transformed”. Sinners of both types “refuse to imitate the Creator”. The abuser of creativity rejects to let himself and his cold heart be changed through the spirit of compassion and justice making while the looser refuses to become a co-creator with God at all. Actually, meditating on the sin against the path of transformation brings Fox to the conclusion “that sin, after all, is not nothing trivial”. Below, with the discussion of the human potential (5.3.b), we will see that the “refusal to create” will even be raised by Fox to the rank of “original sin”.

5.2.e. Sin against who?

So far, we have seen that the anthropocentrism that is implied in the strong emphasis on original sin, is itself interpreted by Fox as sin. Anthropocentrism is a phenomenon of the underlying attitude of inimical dualism. All forms of antagonistic or mutually excluding dualism are diametrically opposed to the ideal of holism. Dualism is, so to speak, the New Age version of ‘original sin’, the error behind all errors. In the Creation spiritual perspective “the way in which humans see themselves as related to nature is one of the most basic of all relationships”. This makes dualism as elementary way of approaching nature, according to Fox, into the real sin that is “behind” all others. Antithetic dualism against creation is “the basis of all sin”. Thus, while in the Plantinga paradigm sinful dualism is basically an “affront to the personal God”, with Fox all sin based on dualism is principally opposed to “the world’s order and

127 OB, 232f; Fox gives various examples of the abuse of power at all levels of existence, in institutions and in society at large. He also describes the correlation between sadism (exerting power over others) and the reaction of masochism (internalizing powerlessness and dependency, “willed ignorance”).

128 OB, 233; Fox refers to Adrienne Rich, Of woman Born and to psychoanalyst Karen Horney’s definition of masochism as I can’tism.

129 OB, 234.

130 OB, 234.

131 OB, 296.

132 OB, 295; examples of sin against the Via Recreativa named by Fox are: “to refuse to use our creativity to transform with; or to settle for superficial uses of our imagination and artistry … To refuse or run from our vocation to be prophetic …”.

133 OB, 210.
foundations”. Obviously, this anti-cosmic aspect makes anthropocentric arrogance and violence against nature awful. But are these forms of dualism to be considered as sin? To what extent is God involved here?

These questions are highly entangled with the narrow closeness that is adopted by Fox in all varieties of the tri-lateral divine-cosmic-human relationship: God-cosmos; human-cosmic and human-divine. The latter relationship is, of course, implied in the pan-en-theism advocated by Fox which will receive more attention below (5.3.c). The discussion on sin, so far, appeared to deal with human iniquity towards creation, with sins of commission against the cosmos. However, when explicitly addressing our connection with God, Fox is not primarily interested in sin but creativity. According to him, it is in human creativity, co-creativity with God that “the divine and the human meet”. Therefore, it must be in connection to creativity that there can be a question of sin, that is, of human opposition in relation to God. For this reason, it is useful to first discuss the last main element of attention, namely the field of human potential which is precisely about human (co-) creativity with God. It is in connection to (co-) creativity that the divine-human relationship, including the possibility of sin, becomes the central theme.

5.3 Human potential

All of creation and especially humans are somehow enchanted by divinity. As created, they embody an original blessing. They are permeated with some form of the divine creative energy. Fox does not hesitate to address this divine immanence by many names, such as the divine word (Dabhar), the Buddha nature, inner person, image of God, inner artist etc. Finally, looking for a name derived from the Creation centred tradition and one that is simultaneously based in the Western, Christian tradition, Fox arrived at the “Cosmic Christ” with which, however, he did not intend to close the list. On the one hand, Fox is obviously an enthusiast who is very positive and excited about the creative potential that is working within humans. On the other hand, as already observed with respect to sin against the Via Creativa (5.2.d), Fox does have an eye for the fact that the given potential is not always actively accepted and executed which induced him to further thinking. With regard to the element ‘human potential’, I will firstly describe the rich and divine character ascribed to it by Fox in theory (a. The Human potential as such – it’s scope) and secondly, address the question to what extent the ‘potential’ in question is really and actually ours (b. The effectuation of your potential by who). In what sense and to what extent do we and can we ourselves realize our potential? As announced above, this will bring us back to the question of sin. Finally, this leads to Fox’s take of pan-en-theism (c. Fox struggle with pan-en-theism).

134 OB, 296.
135 Note the title of Creativity: where the Divine and the Human meet.
136 On the contrary, the inner “divine creative energy” is further identified, e.g., with the “I am” in every creature. This “I am” is connected by Fox with the I am-sayings in the Gospel of John. The notion “I am” as name for the “divine within” was already familiar in certain strains of the New Though. It was used by Warren Felt Evans (1817-1889), indicating the “inner self” or ‘divine spark’ (see: Satter, Each mind, 71); also by Emma Curtis Hopkins (1851-1925) identifying the “I am” with the internal God-self guiding one as “wise counsellor within” (Each mind, 87f). In the 1930s, there was an upsurge of ‘I am’ spirituality through Guy and Edna Ballard (1930s). Like the Cosmic Christ, the ‘I am’ principle refers to the divine presence in all humans revealed by Jesus (CCC, 154f.). About the couple Ballard, see: Mayer, J.-F., “‘I AM’ Activity”, in: DGWE. 585v.
5.3.a. The Human potential as such – its scope

The historical Jesus is the “reveler of the divine ‘I am’”. He shows us “how to embrace our own divinity”.\textsuperscript{137} This role, not only as “reveler” but as “awakener”, is of no small importance as most of us “are asleep and as good as dead”,\textsuperscript{138} unaware of the new life that is our inhering blessedness:

The not-yet-born Cosmic Christ ... who is the Christ of justice, of creativity of compassion in self and society (…) is eager to be born in us. … All of us are anointed ones. We are royal persons, creative, godly, divine, persons of beauty and of grace. We are all Cosmic Christs, “other Christs”. But what good is this if we do not know it. Everyone is a sun of God as well as a son or a daughter of God, but very few believe it or know it. … Meister Eckhart teaches that “we are all meant to be mothers of God”. And thus, we are all called to birth the Cosmic Christ in self and society.\textsuperscript{139}

Fox is expressing, here, the tension between potentiality and actuality with respect to human being. It is about the struggle of becoming what you genuinely are, of effectively receiving and embracing the gift that is already bestowed upon you, but that you still have to realize yourself. Fox remains close to the dynamic inherent in the Catholic understanding of sacraments and the working of grace. Grace has to be ‘given’ by God and then, it must be ‘formed’ by the good works of the receiver in order to become effective.\textsuperscript{140} Likewise, based on the creative inner potential bestowed upon us, we have to engage ourselves in co-creating with the Creator. Moreover, as we are also meant as “mothers of God” and “called to birth the Cosmic Christ in self and society”, apparently, we are entitled not only to co-create with God, we even have to “co-create God” himself.\textsuperscript{141}

The latter idea illumines that Creativity is the essential principle, the ‘place where the divine and the human meet. On the human part, it is “the essence of our nature (…) to give birth, not to destroy. To create”.\textsuperscript{142} With respect to the godly part, Fox observes that divinity is “so close … to creativity that God’s wisdom drives God to create”.\textsuperscript{143} Thus, he can state with respect to our imaginations that they are “powerful, almost God-like …” enabling us to either create or destroy.\textsuperscript{144} Fox actually comes close to identifying creativity with the true meaning of “soul”.\textsuperscript{145} The impli-

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{137} CCC, 154
\item \textsuperscript{138} CCC, 139.
\item \textsuperscript{139} CCC, 136v.
\item Noted as gratia caritate formata; see \textit{CDH}, 129: “If creativity is a grace and not a work (though it requires our work to put it into practice), then …”. On the other hand, the given potential, called creativity, is also designated by Fox as a choice, see \textit{CDH}, 230: “Creativity is a choice (In theological terms, it is grace and works operating together. It is an option to live a life with grace)”.\textsuperscript{140}
\item \textsuperscript{141} \textit{CDH}, 53: “We are not only co-creating with God and the powers of creation, we are actually co-creating God and the powers of creation! They happen through us – just as they happen through other species in the universe and through other expressions of time and space. Eckhart says: (…) “God becomes as creatures express god””.\textsuperscript{141}
\item \textsuperscript{142} \textit{CDH}, 25.
\item \textsuperscript{143} \textit{CDH}, 80.
\item \textsuperscript{144} \textit{CDH}, 25f; see also \textit{CDH}, 79: “Indeed, this force of creativity constitutes our being the image and likeness of the Creator”.
\item \textsuperscript{145} \textit{CDH}, 26; ““Creativity” may be the nearest one-word definition we possess for the essence of our humanity, for the true meaning of “soul””.
\end{enumerate}
cation as regards our being humans is that creating is “our imitating of Divinity”.

The conclusion is that the divine principle of creativity, called word of God or Cosmic Christ, is the “essence of our humanity” and “the true meaning of our soul”. This creative potential is God-like and thus “so powerful” that it harbours the danger of misuse (5.2.d), with it “we can create or destroy”. Thus, what is constantly “before us is choice” says Fox. We must choose and make choices: personal, educational, in business and politics, at all levels of life. However, this need or obligation of choosing the right thing in terms of creation spirituality, presupposes a prior step. What comes first is: that we are willing to be creative, that we want to embrace the given potential. And the question is whether this precondition to the actual effectuation of my human potential, is also part of this potential.

5.3.b. The effectuation of your potential

Having established our great creative potential as the divine blessing and as the divine-human meeting point, Fox shows growing awareness of the problem that a potential is not yet an actuality. This leads to a revaluation of what he considers as the original sin, the sin behind sins. In his earlier works the first candidate was “dualism”, primarily garbed as “anthropocentrism” (5.2.d) but in Creativity (2002) he suggests otherwise. He now asks rhetorically: “is original sin the refusal to create?”.

The Augustinian idea that original sin came from pride (superbia) is decidedly rejected by Fox. The key to interpret the story of Eden is “humankind’s need to be creative” which led to the dilemma that “we are guilty if we create and if we choose not to create”. This brings Fox to the ‘conclusion’ that ultimately the story of Eden is “about one sin only – forfeiting our responsibility for creativity, for being co-workers with God”.

As the negation of our potential, this original or basic sin is identified by Fox with acedia which, according to Thomas is “the capital sin of boredom or sloth or ennui at living” (21; references to Fox, CDH, 2002); also “the refusal of the artist to do his or her art” (74). Thomas saw “pusillanimity as resulting in a grave sin of omission” – pusillanimity, as Fox explains, being the result of “fear and a puny heart”. It makes that humans “fall short of what is proportionate to their power”. Referring to the slothful servant who buried his talent through fainthearted fear (Matthew 25: 14ff), Fox rejects humility as excuse for not creating. Rather he detects ingratitude as well as “coldness” in the refusal to create, also implying the “refusal to share one’s gifts” (73). Sloth or slowness – acedia – makes a subject into an “artiste manqué” designated by Otto Rank as “the original sin of our species” (97). Such a person is one “who has failed to accept the burden of his or her difference” (33). The question, now, is how to recover from leaving your potential unused? Is this recovery also part of the human potential?

The problem of transforming acedia as the refusal to create into active execution of creativity does raise the question of our human potential to a next or meta level,
namely to the question whether actively choosing for creativity is part of our own potential. Is the structurally given Cosmic Christ enough to revive our creativity when it falls asleep? When we(!) fall asleep? Or do we need additional aid in order to transform and become creative again? Creative de facto?! The answer is that Fox does have recourse to the divine spirit while nearly merging together the Holy Spirit with the Spirit of creativity.

One reason creativity takes courage is that the Holy Spirit is no small force to let into our lives. This is, after all, the very Spirit that ‘drives the heavens’. It is powerful, it is far bigger than us, it drives the forces of nature from fireball to galaxies … Furthermore, we so long for this Spirit to fill our souls that when we encounter it we often dance with madness. … Wildness is everywhere in our relationship with the Spirit. Who is in charge here? Certainly not we.151

Although we are not in charge, we certainly must “be ready and receptive” and even courageous to let the Spirit take charge. If we do, then the Spirit “cannot help but come” gracing us with creativity. It then requires, of course, our own work to act creatively but still “creativity is a grace” and therefore “not our doing”.152 It appears that Fox is wrestling with the very problem of human freedom as was Augustine in his struggle with Pelagius and Julian (1.1.3) Coming remarkably close to his famous antagonist, Fox is constantly nuancing, correcting himself time and again. Creativity is a grace, it is not our doing, not we but the Spirit is in charge … but then seemingly to the contrary, he states:

Creativity is a choice. (In theological terms, it is grace and works operating together. It is an option to live a life with grace.) Creativity is not a particular gift given to certain people only. It is a personal choice and a cultural choice. An individual choice and a family, professional, and societal choice, and at this time in our history it is a species choice. We choose whether to let creativity flow or not – in our educational systems, our media, our politics, our economics, our religions, our very psyches. In theological terms, it is a matter of letting the Spirit in, the Christ in ….153

The human potential of creativity is pictured alternately as a grace and as a human work; as inspired by the Holy Spirit and simultaneously as our own choice. Time and again, Fox changes his point of outlook from emphasizing creativity as the gift that is already ours, to accentuating that the gift still needs to be untied by the Spirit; from stressing that the Cosmic Christ is working in the cosmos and in us, to highlighting that we must birth the Cosmic Christ and unleash creativity ourselves. But it appears that we do not always do so and then, the potential creativity needs to be implemented by the Holy Spirit. Again, in order to let the Spirit work, we must allow it to do so, we must let the Spirit in. But once inside of us, we are no longer in charge. This continuous skipping from one perspective onto the other is tied up with the religious-scientific model that is adopted by Fox, namely pan-en-theism.

151 CDH, 74.
152 CDH, 129.
153 CDH, 230.
5.3.c. Fox’s struggle with pan-en-theism

So far, we have seen that, rejecting both traditional theism and its heretical counterpart pantheism, Fox has explicitly adopted pan-en-theism to describe the way he sees divine immanence. The model is favoured by him for it “slips in the little Greek word en”, meaning that something of “God is in everything” (5.1.d). All of creation is blessed with some amount of “divine creative energy” (5.1.b). which, seen from the human standpoint, is our human potential. Although this divine blessing had been kept in the dark for long in the fall/redemption tradition, it survived according to Fox in the creation centred tradition; and it was uncovered and newly experienced through creation centred spirituality. One would hope that now creativity starts to flow again spontaneously and with abundance; and that all humans transform and emerge as natural born artisans. However, as it appeared in the previous subsection, the effectuation of the given potential is not a matter of course. Notwithstanding the “image of God” in humans, the indwelling “word of God” (Dabhar), or Cosmic Christ inside of everyone, the Holy Spirit had to be called in, to actually unlock the creative energy within us. One time after another, the original divine gift, which is supposed to be our most treasurable potential, is forwarded by Fox from an altered perspective and a different theological locus.154 Even then, the release of creativity did not follow automatically, it remained a matter of our choice as well. As he had already acknowledged on the Vía Recreativa, sin is no trivial thing.155 Fox is involuntarily confronted with ‘a resisting amount of dualism’ between the divine and the human element which, according to his former definition of pan-en-theistic mysticism, he did not expect.

Healthy mysticism is pan-en-theistic. This means that it is not theistic, which envisions divinity “out there” or even “in here” in a dualistic manner that separates creation from divinity (italics ffo). Pan-en-theism means “all things in God and God in all things”.156

In CCC (1988) not only the theistic perspective of divinity “out there” was anathema to Fox. He then also declined as crypto theism perspectives that adopt some form of immanence or en-theism, but “in a dualistic manner”. In the 1980s divinity within was hallowed by him as entirely and naturally belonging to us, without any notion that it might also represent a certain otherness in humans which, by contrast, is the core element of traditional theism.

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154 Fox is skipping repeatedly to another notion and to another theological locus from which the notion is derived. Starting with Creation-theological notions (image of God, creative word of God), he changed to Christology (Cosmic Christ) and then to Pneumatology (the Holy Spirit). Fox has also taken recourse to Eschatology (Second Coming, CCC, 157-246). Apparently even the Spirit is unfit to effectively unlock our potential: the divine creative energy inside of us. With respect to the figure embodying the “Second Coming, Fox observes that he will combine “the historical and incarnational rootedness of Jesus the prophet with the spatial and cosmic mysticism of the Cosmic Christ to effect a renaissance, a change of hearts and ways” (CCC, 162). Fox is also amply discussing questions like: “What does the return of the Cosmic Christ do for us today? How does it resurrect the human spirit …?” (CCC, 163-244), regarding a great variety of issues like sexuality (177ff), the relationship between generations (180ff), creativity (199ff), education (209ff), worship (211ff), and ecumenism (228ff).

155 Above 5.2.d (reference to OB, 295).

156 CCC (1988), 57.
In CDH (2002) Fox still is far from fond of anything that reeks of dualism. Yet, his picture of the role of the Holy Spirit, as described in the previous subsection, as well as his description of the Spirit’s function and location within a person (5.3b), actually give us a perfect example of spiritual presence which is simultaneously “in here” and at least to some extent “in a dualistic manner”. Once we let the Spirit in, “madness” and wild things will happen, since the Holy Spirit is no “small force”. This led him to the question ‘who is in charge here?’ to which he gave a definite answer: certainly not we, implying an undeniable amount of dualism. So, there is some development between the strictly non-dual definition of pan-en-theistic mysticism given in CCC (1988) denying any form of dualism, and his later pneumatological observations in CDH (2002) implying the acknowledgment of immanence combined with some amount of dualism or at least dialectic duality. Actually, this latter option which is a form of “inner transcendence” has become a subject of discussion in theology as well.

Obviously, the rejection by Fox of theism and his choice for an explicit pan-en-theist perspective is essential to his theo-cosmological system of living cosmology. The pan-en-theist model reveals a significant change not only in the perception of the divine-human relationship but also as regards the doctrine of sin. In the intermediate paragraph (§6) I will take stock of these changes primarily concerning the aggrieved object of sin, together with those of Roberts and ACiM. But first, in the next and final section of this paragraph, I will collect the findings that substantiate these changes, according to the Four Question and Four esoteric benchmarks.

157 See the quotation above in small print, CDH, 74.

158 For a typology of four possible forms of transcendence, in which ‘here’ and ‘beyond’ are more or less associated, see: Stoker & Van der Merwe (eds.), Culture and Transcendence, 6-8. The volume contains among others, a contribution on a) “Immanent transcendence” by Werner Schusser discussing Paul Tillich as example; b) “Radical transcendence” by Cornelis van der Kooi taking Karl Barth as example. Other contributions are on c) “Radical Immanence” implying the total farewell to extra mundane otherness; and d) “Transcendence as alterity” which emphasizes reality of “otherness” as such, no matter its (transcendent or immanent) origin. See further on ‘inner transcendence’ (‘interne transcendentie’): Vroom, “God en Leegte: Persoonlijk of onpersoonlijk?” in: NTT, 56 (2002) 299-312, 304v., discussing the perspective of Kitaro Nishida, founder of the Kyoto School of Filosofie. Defending Mahayana Buddhism, Nishida denies its representing pantheism. The relationship between the transcendent God and the world of beings is described by Nishida as ‘contradicting identity’ (contradictoire identiteit (305). Thus, he denies pantheistic identification and holds on to - as Vroom puts it - “a distinction between the divine and reality in which the divine expresses itself, and with which it maintains a contradicting identity” (“een onderscheid tussen het goddelijke en de realiteit waarin het goddelijke zich uitdrukt en waarmee het contradictoer identiek is”) (310). The One, God, expresses It/Him/Her self in all things without losing It/Him/Her self. Vroom mentions as biblical illustrations Ps. 36,9/10 (For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light); and Gal.2,20 (I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me).

Another example of ‘inner transcendence’ was recognized in the theology of Pannenberg by Brinkman, Het Gods- en Mensbegrip in de Theologie van Wolfhart Pannenberg. On the basis of – what Brinkman discussed as - “Pannenberg’s panentheïsme” (72) and without pantheistic identification, Pannenberg is able to maintain, says Brinkman, that all of reality bears witness of immanent divine activity. The implication is that God is ‘transcendent in the very midst of our life’, revealing himself in our history, while human history is never independent or self-supporting with respect to God (“Zonder nu pantheïstisch God en de aardse werkelijkheid te identificeren kan Pannenberg er toch van uitgaan dat heel de werkelijkheid getuigenis aflegt van Gods werkzaamheid. God is “nuttig in ons leven jenseits” God openbaart zich in onze geschiedenis, maar de geschiedenis is nooit een ten opzichte van God zelfstandige grootheid” (73v)).
5.4 Inventory of findings

As done with Roberts/Seth and ACiM, I will make an inventory, firstly regarding the four questions, and secondly assessing the two main esoteric indicators and the two additional characteristics as developed by the anti-apologetic criticism (2.1.2.c.ii; 2.1.3). The data are inserted in the Inventory Table (§ 6).

5.4.1 Four questions

(1) Divine-human unity? (−)

Even though he is presupposing holism, Fox is also fervently advocating for it. This shows that he is aware of the discrepancy between his spiritual ideal and belief on the one hand and actual reality on the other. Fox envisions intimate closeness primarily between God and the world or cosmos; or rather, between the Creator and his creation (5.1.d). A holistic unity and bond exist between them as between the great Artisan and his/her work of creative art. The Creator has put something of himself, namely the creative principle of the divine Dabhar or Cosmic Christ in all of his creation, also intended to foster further creativity (5.1.b; 5.3.c). The God-cosmos relationship will be further discussed below (5.4.2.(a and d)).

Ontologically, as human beings we are part of the great masterpiece that creation is, while the Cosmic Christ, inhabiting all of creation, is in particular indwelling us. But as humans we behave like usurpers, putting ourselves at the centre, abusing the cosmos, maltreating nature. Fox’s high ideal is that we should be, can be, and basically are partners, co-creators with the great Artisan; but we really do so only when we follow the four paths of Creation Spirituality, and we co-create only on the condition that we let the Holy spirit in. Clearly, divine-human identity is an ideal for Fox, but given all his criticism of anthropocentrism and of human opposition against creation (and even against the divine creative principle within oneself), Fox cannot be said to have ontologically identified the divine with the human. Hence, a minus.

(2) Denial of original sin, especially of the element of non posse? (+)

The change of focus from original sin to original blessing, the indwelling of this blessing as divine Word or Cosmic Christ in all creation, together with Fox’s criticism on anything reeking of I can’t-ism all point towards a firm plus. Even then, Fox does have his own alternative(s) for original sin, designated by him as the sin behind sin: anthropocentrism, dualism, and the refusal to create. But these are not meant as the inevitable cause of subsequent sins, but rather as their essence. Anthropocentrism and dualism describe the innermost nature of all human aggression against other creatures. Clearly, denying non posse does not automatically mean unreserved affirmation of a fully active human potential. This will further appear in the discussion of direct gnosis (below 5.4.2.(b)).

(3) Denial of other evil? (+)

In his discussion with Sheldrake, Fox refused to admit to evil in nature. Evil comes only from human hands. What we meet along the via negativa leading through the shadow and dark sides of life is not evil to be battled. Instead we should try to befriend the darkness, including the painful episodes in life, as possibly the most fertile moments, similar to the darkness of the womb during pregnancy and the pain of giving birth to new life. Against Sheldrake, Fox even feels obliged to deliver a sort of
**cosmodicy**, defending violence in nature as indispensable to create new life. It is not evil but at most uncomfortable. As such it can even add to beauty and new creativity (5.2.a). But elements in reality that must be called evil, according to Fox, cannot be separated from human being and can be captured under the question of human sin.

(4) **Denial of actual sin?** (–)

All his critique against traditional views on sin do certainly not mean that Fox rejects the notion itself. Actually, human sin is the only thing he calls evil. Sin for him is either the misuse of creativity, due to antithetic dualism and anthropocentrism, or the refusal to create at all (5.2.d), which implies wasting your creative potential (5.3.b). Misuse of creativity, according to Fox, always leads to abuse and maltreating creation. Seen from the outside, this mishandling is aimed against the world, against nature or one’s fellow creatures. At first sight it is anti-cosmic, aimed against some part of creation, and not directly against God.

The question to what extent Fox’s notion can be qualified as sin in the full theological sense of being anti-divine will be discussed in the next intermediate paragraph (6.3.3.c).

5.4.2 **Four anti-apologetic benchmarks**

Like before, I will start each subsection with a short accumulation of the concerning benchmark. Then I will discuss to what extent the concerning mark can be relevantly applied to the Foxian perspective.

(a) **Co-eternity?** (+)

The meaning of co-eternity is reversely determined by one or more of the opposing meaning-aspects of the notion *creation ex nihilo*. One of these aspects is that creation has an essentially lower or secondary ontological status, since it is seen as entirely dependent in relation to the Creator. Moreover, when combined with a strong doctrine of sin, creation from nothing underscores that Creator and creation are separated from each other; that they are in antagonistic and (in the case of humans) sinful opposition against one another. By contrast, co-eternity implies equal ontological standing of the Creator and creation; and with respect to the divine-human relationship it implies a close spiritual proximity, possibly to the extent of ontological unity.

The general drift of Fox’s thinking tends to connecting the Creator and creation, God and the cosmos (rather than God and the human being) so closely together that it borders on identification. God, the cosmos and the cosmic order appear as practically interchangeable (5.1.d). This close divine-cosmic proximity is underlined by Fox’s re-naming the traditional *divine-human* Christ into the *cosmic* Christ. Both God and (wo)man, the human and the divine are subsumed under the cosmos. Correspondingly, Fox has advocated for a religious attitude of *living cosmology* (5.1.a). For humans, the spiritual aim and focus is to gain and practise a lively interaction with creation itself, that is, with the cosmos or world of which we are a part as humans. While attributing great religious importance to the created world or cosmos, Fox also makes clear that our world does by no means stand on its own, in separate or autonomous fashion. Instead, it is created, upheld, and blessed with indwelling divinity. It is the all-permeating creative energy of God that makes the cosmos and ourselves into a living whole (5.1.b). As said with respect to the second type of New Age holism (2.2.1.b), Fox, too,
is not so much interested in the origin of the cosmos, nor in its supposed early genesis by the exclusive hand of a divine Creator, but rather in the present and enduring immanence of God through his word (Dabhar), or through the Cosmic Christ in all parts of his creation, the entire cosmos. Fox never mentions the doctrine of “creation from nothing”, but it seems clear that he does not support it, and certainly not its anti-apologetic explication.

This means that with Fox co-eternity is seen as the being with (co-) of the Eternal, that is, the eternal blessing and present indwelling of the Eternal in every manifestation of reality. This is the perspective of pan-en-theism, also referred to as cosm-theism (see below under d). In his own words, it is “a way of seeing the world sacramentally” (5.1.d). The world is not just a neutral stage on which the real thing of our meeting God takes place. Much more, the cosmos of divine creation is in its entirety the revealing medium, “the primary sacrament” (5.1.b) which in no way can be separated from the divine. Dealing with (some part of) the world is meeting God. For the ecumenical, former Catholic Fox, not only a consecrated Eucharistic host is divine and holy, the entire cosmos is. Without implying ontological unity (see above 5.4.1.(1)), the Creator and creation, God as mother and mother nature, are seen by Fox as inseparably belonging together. Therefore, I insert a plus (+) in the inventory table.

(b) Pursuit of direct gnosis? (−)

Inner gnosis of ultimate reality can be called direct when it is either present within oneself or can be gained without the need of mediation or revelation through outer agents or scientific experiments.

For Fox, neither interiority nor gnosis is of the highest importance to humans. His spirituality is rather connected with playful creativity and existence. Not knowledge through introspection, but rather creativity (in interaction with the outer world) is the place where the divine and the human meet (5.3.a). As humans we meet God or the divine in the creative and imaginative interaction with the outer world. Fox called this “living cosmology”: a combination of science, mysticism and art (5.1.a). The mystical element he further elaborated as “Creation centred spirituality”. Now, that this Creation spirituality would flow directly and spontaneously along all the four paths (5.2.a), especially the Via creativa, is certainly his heartfelt ideal and longing. Fox is strong in his profession of inner divinity and does not like to see it “in a dualistic manner” (5.3.c). Instead, he has an enthusiastic understanding of original blessing, as the wildly creative potential bestowed on all humans. Still, he cannot and does not ignore that only too often one’s spiritual experience and imaginative creativity, though meant to flow naturally from the Divine Dabhar or Cosmic Christ inside us, are still in need of mediation, transformation, and additional activation through the Holy Spirit (5.3.b). Fox, therefore, does not make any claims that direct knowledge and unrestrained spontaneous creativity are exclusively based on our own deliberate and active potential which qualifies for a minus (−) on the present entry.

(c) The denial or dissolution of the individual soul? (−)

The denial of the immortal and individual soul seems to be implied in emanative cosmologies, especially when the emanated soul is believed to return to God, in the manner of a raindrop flowing back into the godly ocean. According to the anti-apologetic criticism, such a perspective tends inevitably to dissolve individuality, and
therewith, to relativize personal responsibility and accountability, within existence and beyond.

In the work of Fox, I see no sign of trivializing individual personhood nor of minimizing human responsibility, rather the reverse. Certainly, Fox is not a fan of introspection (5.2.c). He has little appreciation for the Fall/redemption focus on the individual soul of the fallen sinner. He characterises the traditional emphasis (on sin and personal salvation) itself negatively as anthropocentrism. Fox does not negate, but he has a special idea of the human soul. According to him, the essence or soul of human being is the original blessing of creativity represented in the Cosmic Christ (5.3.a). This gives humans a great responsibility, namely, to co-create with the creator (5.1.b), even to foster his immanence, and give further birth to the divine, to the Cosmic Christ in self and society (5.3.a). The one great and thrilling thing in human existence for Fox is to enjoy this blessing, and to heartily contribute to it, personally, with the whole of one’s own creative life.

\(d\) The denial of a personal trans-mundane Creator God? (+)

The ontological predication trans-mundane implies a certain dualism, at least a clear distinction between God and world. When God is professed as being a person, then it seems that logically, he cannot simultaneously be identified with an immanent principle of self-organisation, an implicate order, or pattern that connects (2.2.1.b). Those who believe God to be the highest person and trans-mundane Creator of the world, may very well accept him as the ultimate architect of universal unity. But for them, God does not coincide with this unity.

With Fox, however, the Creator and creation, God and the cosmos are closely linked together, coming near to identification. Discussing a case of a scandalous environmental pollution Fox observed that God cleanses …, the cosmos keeps a ledger, and the cosmic order does not tolerate (5.1.d). While God and cosmos are merged together, a transmission of person-like features seems to take place from God to the cosmos. The cosmos addresses us and even loves us (5.1.b). The aggrieved object of our sins of dualism (greed, indifference, human injustice) is not primarily God but the cosmos seen as a living being. The cosmos and, what Fox calls, the “godhead” are nearly identified. Thus, religion for Fox is primarily and really cosmic, that is Creation oriented spirituality. God is revered not above or beyond but in and with the world. So far, we are induced to insert a plus in the Inventory Table.

Simultaneously, it must be said that Fox explicitly objects to a crude identification of God and cosmos as in literal pantheism (all is God). Moreover, and significantly, he does embrace theistic symbolism of God as the creative “craftsperson” or the “supreme Artisan” without ado. He is filled with delight about “God’s creation”\(^{159}\). Such symbolic expressions contradict or at least differ from the tendency towards divine-cosmic identification. Actually, they suggest differentiation between the Creator and his creation which asks for minus. Apparently, the distinctions are not as clear and clean as one would like. Adopting and inadvertently using traditional symbolism does not bring Fox to literally see the divine Creator as a personal deity in theistic

\(^{159}\) Italics mine, see \(OB\), 70, where Fox is citing Honorius of Autun (1125) with enthusiastic approval, to the extent that “all in God’s creation gives great delight to anyone looking upon it, for … there is beauty … healing … food … meaning. (…) The supreme Artisan made the universe like a great zither upon which he placed strings to yield a variety of sounds ….”
sense, instead theism is categorically rejected by him\textsuperscript{160}. Clearly, the image of a personal, extra-mundane God harbours little to no inspiration for Fox. What really pours down from the symbolic God talk is the “divine creative energy”, the Word or Cosmic Christ, permeating all creation. Actually, he combines theistic imagery (Creator, Artisan) with the religious experience of divinity in all things. Thus, God is referred to with theistic symbolism, even though ontologically, He is not seen as a really existing theistic person, nor even as the primary address of Fox’s spirituality. With a strong focus on the sacramental cosmos, Fox’s religious worldview can aptly be designated as cosmo-theism. This term, which is used by philosophers and scientists of religion\textsuperscript{161} adequately designates the two elements – God (or rather divinity) and cosmos - Fox so fervently tries to combine.

The compatibility or togetherness of theism and cosmo-theism (pan-en-theism) is something to take along for further consideration (see Part Four, 10.4.b.iii).

The results of all three sources will be entered in the inventory Table of Four Questions and Four anti-apologetic Benchmarks shown in the next paragraph (§ 6). They will be used for further evaluation and to formulate further questions.

\textsuperscript{160} CCC, 57: Fox observes that “… most atheism is a rejection of theism … I do believe that if the only option I was given by which to envision creation’s relationship to divinity was theism that I would be an atheist too”.

\textsuperscript{161} Hanegraaff, \textit{Esotericism and the Academy}, 371, observes that the term, originally coined in 1782 (by Lamoignon de Malesherbes), was adopted by the Egyptologist Jan Assmann as the logical counterpart to monotheism.
§ 6 Taking Stock

In the main Introduction I assumed two general ideas as typical for New Age, firstly, the adoption of a holistic view on divine-human closeness or unity, secondly a high valuation of the human self to meet with the divine or to achieve realization of self. In the present paragraph, I will check the validity of these presuppositions with respect to the selected sources, respectively under the heading of Cosmology (6.1) and Human Potential (6.2). I will discuss both presuppositions while taking into account the relevant entries and results in the Inventory Table.

Based on both general assumptions, I thirdly presumed a critical stance on the part of New Age towards the Christian doctrine of sin. Since this touches upon the core of my study, it is appropriate, before proceeding to the theologians, to assess the findings on sin so far and discuss them in relation to the traditional concept of sin, as defined by Plantinga: sin as “culpable and personal affront to a personal God”. Actually, this concept contains three elements that form the structure of the sin relationship. The one end in this relationship is the sinner (human subject), the other end is the aggrieved party (divine object). And sin is the antagonistic relationship between them (dualistic opposition). Under the heading of Hamartiology (6.3), I will review and analyze how each source relates to each of the three structural elements in particular. Thus, we can learn about the particular points of resistance represented by the sources against one or more elements in the traditional concept of sin which may sharpen our focus on what is the essence of sin and give clues for a reformulation.

Inventory Table
of Four Questions (1-4) and Four anti-apologetic Benchmarks (a-d).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Roberts/Seth</th>
<th>ACiM</th>
<th>Fox</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Divine-human unity</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial orig. sin</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+(−)</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial of evil (other than sin)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+(−)</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial actual sin</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+(−)</td>
<td>−</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-eternity</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct gnosis</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>±</td>
<td>−</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denial of individual soul</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>−</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial of a personal, trans-mundane God</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>±</td>
<td>±</td>
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In the second intermediate paragraph (§ 9), the Table will be completed with the results found in Barth (§ 7) and Tillich (§ 8).

6.1 Cosmology

The entries in the Inventory table that have bearing on the cosmological worldview are the first question and the first benchmark. The concern the first question of research (Main Introduction, 4).
6.1.1 Question 1: Divine-human unity?

Divine-human unity is emphasized ontologically by Roberts and in *ACiM*. Roberts rejected all belief in “opposites” as based on limited ego perception (3.2.1.a), whereas the ontology (4.1.b) in *ACiM* explicitly excludes any form of “separation” (4.2.b). Fox does not deny this unity, but he does not state divine-human unity by means of an explicit ontology or the-anthropology like the other two either. His focus is rather on the divine-cosmic unity, or at least intimate closeness between the creator and all of creation. This nearness is realized in the all-permeating Word of God or Cosmic Christ (5.1.b, c). As part of creation, humans are part of the cosmos but they often behave as enemies in a dualistic manner, putting themselves in the center (anthropocentrism) maltreating the surrounding world.

6.1.2 Benchmark a: Co-eternity

All three sources affirm in one way or the other the first essential of esotericism: co-eternity. Two of them envision created reality as originating from emanation (Roberts) or extension (*ACiM*), in both cases directly deriving from the divine. By the Christian theologian among them, reality is seen as creatively enchanted by the divine principle (Fox). In the first two sources, emanated or created reality is seen as an inner, spiritual affair, it is something of the mind. For Roberts it is the all-encompassing network of entities of ‘creative consciousness’ ranging from inner self, soul to All That Is (3.1.c, d). In *ACiM* it is the spiritual Sonship or Kingdom of God (4.1.b) to which all humans basically and ultimately belong. Whereas outer physical reality is entirely dismissed as illusory in the Course, it is granted a temporary and limited reality in the Seth-books. Only Fox has primary and genuine appreciation for the outer, physical world or cosmos which he sees as enlivened and made holy by indwelling divinity. Conclusion: despite diverging ontological recognition of inner spiritual and outer physical reality, all three sources highly treasure divine-human unity (Roberts, *ACiM*) or at least intimate closeness between the Creator and creation (Fox).

6.2 Human potential

The relevant entries with regard to human potential are the second question and the second benchmark. They concern the second question of research.

6.2.1 Question 2: Denial original sin?

All three sources critically reject ‘original sin’ (Qu.2), in particular the element of *non posse*, though for different reasons. For Roberts the stumbling block is the suggestion of a sentence placed upon humans, a kind of limiting doom. Instead, it is emphasized by her spokesman Seth that you are not “under a pall placed upon you”. Limitless imaginative creativity and therewith the potential of “creating your own reality” are available to anyone, unhindered by a doom like original sin (3.2.2.a). In *ACiM*, the point of resistance is the suggestion of divine-human separation implied in the idea of sin as such. Any perception of divine-human antagonism, enmity, or even separation is vehemently denied by the Course as purely illusory (4.1.b; 4.2.b). Or it is seen as the result of an original error (4.2.d). According to *ACiM*, we are ontologically (and unfailingly) in a similar predicament as Augustine put us in after receiving the grace of the *donum perseverantiae*, namely in the state of *non posse peccare* (see 1.1.3).
For Fox, the poisoning thing of original sin, as it has worked in the history of Christianity, is that it has promoted a paralyzing spirituality of “I can’t-ism” which has crippled the blessed experience of and engagement in playful creativity.

6.2.2 Benchmark B: Direct Gnosis

With respect to the second essential of esotericism the scores differ slightly. Roberts maintained that the ‘door’ normally separating us (as ego’s) from the divine is “tissue paper thin”. When we exist in our normal subject-object consciousness, being off guard for just a moment can be enough to let divine knowledge flood into our daylight consciousness from within. When this happens, as Roberts experienced herself, we appear to be naturally clairvoyant and spiritually telepathic (§ 3 Intro). Theoretically, or ontologically, ACiM adopts a similar perspective of intimate divine-human unity (4.1.b). By contrast, however, it is also stated in the Course that in the illusory or ego-dominated world of outer existence, there is either no communication at all between Gods Self and the human self, between S/spirit and ego (4.2.d); or there is renewing communication, but only from the side of and through the Holy Spirit (4.3.b). Both views are expressed in ACiM. For Fox, direct inner knowledge should not be our first concern. The primary focus of his “Living cosmology” is rather on outer reality. He invites us to engage in direct experience of outer reality and to creatively interact with it. For Fox, this also leads to and goes along with mystical interaction with immanent divinity in all things (pan-en-theism; or cosmo-theism)

Conclusion: there is both variation and agreement between the three on human potential, to the extent that being (or creating, acting, imagining …) closely or directly in rapport with the divine is at any moment possible (Roberts), or ontologically normal and true (ACiM). For Fox, interacting with the inner divinity in all things, is the most natural, spiritual, and creative thing to pursue for humans, although many refuse to do so. Though each source has its own variety, all three imply a high regard of human potential.

6.3 Hamartiology

The three structural elements in the sin relationship are dualistic or antagonistic opposition (6.3.1), human person as sinner (6.3.2), and the personal God as the aggrieved party (6.3.3). I will discuss how the sources relate to each element. The relevant entries from the Inventory Table are the questions 3 and 4; and the benchmark c and d. They concern the third question of research regarding the issue of personhood of divine and human being.

6.3.1 Dualistic or Antagonistic Opposition

According to question 1 in the Inventory Table, Roberts and ACiM state ontological divine-human unity. By consequence, it seems all too obvious that they can only reject the idea of sin (qu.3). Moreover, when there is no opposition, dualism or separation whatsoever between two congenial parties, what could there be sinful or evil (qu.4) or even impedimental? The point however, is that denying evil and sin is such a ‘performance’ that one should be curious how this denial is achieved. In fact, both sources use various philosophic-metaphysical perspectives and arguments: ontological, anthropological, theological to build their case.

Therefore, I will review some of these arguments at more length, in particular concerning the two sides of the sin relationship: the human person as subject of sin (6.3.2)
and the deity as the ‘object’ of sin (6.3.3). In the case of Roberts and ACIM these are perspectives that enable them to evade ‘opposition’/’separation’ and thus deny evil and sin. Even when their arguments are only convincing to emic insiders, they reveal underlying motifs on part of the sources, and corresponding points of resistance against the doctrine of sin which may help us to get to the core of the problem of sin.

Fox represents a particular and exceptional voice. Diverging from the ontological monism, advocated largely by Roberts and fully in ACIM, he had a keen eye for anthropocentrism and harmful opposition caused by humans. With him the point is that he identified this opposition not primarily as anti-divine but anti-cosmic. Still he called it sin.

6.3.2 The Human Person – Benchmark C: Denial of Individual Soul

According to Plantinga, sinful opposition against God is a culpable and personal thing. It takes an identifiable and distinguishable person as responsible and accountable actor. The Inventory Table shows that Roberts and ACIM score a ‘plus’ on benchmark c: denial of individual soul which I take predominantly as denial of separate or distinguishing individual personhood. In fact, their anthropologies are so strongly intent, on trivializing the outer (ego-)person as well as on dissolving the inner self or soul, that I assume a more or less basic motif behind it. With this in mind, I will have a close review of how Roberts and ACIM do actually relate to human personhood.

Fox is a different case. Whereas Roberts and ACIM accepted only inner, spiritual personhood as real, he emphasized both inner and outer personhood. With respect to all three sources, I will suggest a basic motif that appears broadly in their teachings and to certain extent accounts for their anthropology.

6.3.2.a Roberts – Craving for Limitless Imaginative Freedom

Compared to Plantinga’s emphasis on responsibility as a person, on individual accountability and personal guilt, the anthropology of Roberts /Seth seems to be equally intent on diminishing the distinctive individuality of the human being, as on affirming the fundamental openness and continuous development of the human self or soul. Definiteness in the sense of a final determination of the personal-individual element is denied. The human self or soul, one’s true identity, is strongly affirmed as principally open ended and in process of continuous development, merging together with other entities of consciousness (3.1.c; 3.2.e). On the rejecting side, Roberts displays a strong reaction against any kind of limitation or domination by outer authority, whether exerted by a God, by other humans, or through supposed fate, a spell or

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1 3.1.c., SS, 72; 83: your soul or prime identity is “in itself a gestalt of many other individual consciousnesses.”

2 See SM, 281, where Seth in an outburst of disapproval, draws an extraordinary negative picture of the “narrow and evilly self-righteous … governing powers” in the Middle Ages. These powers, according to Roberts/Seth would have used atomic weapons without hesitation, if they had had them in their possession. Further: “In those [medieval] days neither did a sane, reasonable man give thought to sharing his wealth, or even consider the plight of the poorer classes. Not only was charity not given, its practical nature was not even considered. The archaic concept of God nicely covered such matters. The poor were obviously sinful. Poverty was their penance, and it was considered a sacrilege to try to help those whom God had cursed. Animals were tortured in sport. Compassion for living things in males was regarded as a weakness to be plucked out. Women were scarcely thought of as human, except in very select circles”. I (ffo) am tempted to assume that these lines show us more of the reigning ideals of the 1960’s and forth – and of the frustration with authoritarianism underlying these ideals – than of the reality in the Middle Ages.
syndrome built up in personal history even including past-lives (3.2.2.a). Her deepest motif appears to be a deep craving for freedom in the most all-encompassing sense, personally and creatively: freedom in all directions of fiction, imagination as well as science.\(^3\) The supreme law in the spirituality of Roberts (and that of Seth) is that no individual soul, no entity of consciousness shall ever be pinned down to what it was, or momentarily is: “you are not bound to any category or corner of existence. Your reality cannot be measured …” (3.1.c; 3.4.c).\(^4\) By contrast, the only reality of ‘me’ that can be measured, namely the person I am as outer ego, is not considered as the real me, the ego is but a fragmentary, temporary and remote reflection of my genuine identity which is radically open-ended.

Actually, it is Roberts’ open-ended soul, and its inherent, thoroughly elusive perspective on personal identity (see 3.1.c) that prompts me to wonder whether there is a connection with her negation of evil including sin. The question then is whether there is a dependency or sequence running from her anthropology to her ontology implying that the denial or supposed illusory character of all types of evil proceeds from, or at least, is made possible through the dissolution of the human person. I will illuminate the possibility of such connection – of course within the confines of Roberts’ own cosmology - with an example of moral evil.

When the perpetrator of a supposed criminal or immoral act is the limited (outer) ego person, then culpability and responsibility are hard to impute, since the real human self with his/her transcending identity is not involved in this act. This is all the more so because the alleged victim’s personality is similarly dissolved and made elusive. When there is neither a real, clearly identifiable doer, nor such a victim, what then is the evil? Similarly, a form of so called natural evil is only felt as evil on the narrow level of outer ego consciousness. As ego-individual, I may find myself a victim of, say, a falling tree or volcano eruption. But to the larger spiritual person I really am – that is, to my inner self or soul - the same event, far from being evil, may bring new creative possibilities rather than harm (3.2.1.b). Thus, Roberts can identify evil as “ignorance” (3.2.1.a) meaning that the idea of evil only appears as illusory perception in the narrow scope of ego consciousness. The point is that, if there is no definable human being, either as subject or as victimized object …, when there is no definite personal identity or self – namely a self that is not only spiritual and changing but also with some form of discernable manifestation and steadiness in outer existence, then there seems to be no sense in speaking of evil either. In case of a crime, the only thing harmed is the outer appearance of a person, the limited and temporary ego, not the true identity of the genuine personal self. When no real person is harmed, no real person needs to be blamed either. Evil has evaporated. There might be on exception though.

Within the belief system of Roberts/Seth, evil could only be something real, if antagonistic or inimical dualism occurred between true identities in the inner sphere of spirit, a hypothetical struggle between two inner spiritual entities. Such spiritual antithesis would have to occur between two inner selves that are joined in a group identity (soul) or “multidimensional personality” (3.1.c). Actually, this is the setting where, according to Roberts, the decision is made

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3 I note that Roberts started her writing career in the genre of science fiction (biographical introduction § 3).

4 SS, 355; especially SS, 72: “There are no limitations to your own entity: therefore, how can your entity or soul have boundaries, for boundaries would enclose it and deny it freedom”.

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concerning the next incarnation of an inner self. But Roberts never gives a hint of any spiritual turmoil in this inner dimension, there is no spiritual war whatsoever in the ‘heavenly realms’. I recall that belief in opposites is dismissed by Roberts as the illusory result of ego-ignorance (3.2.1.a). Correspondingly, the inner group-decisions concerning the further evolution of each inner self (including next incarnations) seem to be taken in full harmony, and always in accordance with the sort of experience a specific inner self needs to go through in order to advance to a next stage of development. Anyhow, the acta of these inner and pre-incarnational group-entity meetings are similarly remote and hidden to the outer ego, as the inner Trinitarian deliberations of divine Providence are to the ordinary Christian.

The sequence or logic runs from anthropology to ontology. It starts with the radical spiritualization of the human person, continuously changing, evolving, connecting with higher and larger entities of consciousness. For Roberts, such perpetua evolutio of personhood did perfectly suit her craving for limitless freedom. The other side of the coin is that it unavoidably implies the entire dissolution or denial of humans as distinguishable and identifiable persons. This provokes the relativization and denial of the reality of (all) evil, both on the doer and on the victim side. The denial of evil including sin follows from the dissolution of personhood. As soon as evil is experienced by an ignorant entity of consciousness, namely the temporary ego, the real person has already escaped so to speak, having learned an important lesson and developed further to a next, higher stage of reality.

6.3.2.B ACiM - yearning towards unbroken unity of harmonious love

Whereas Roberts not even seems to have considered the possibility of two spiritual entities harmfully countering each other, this seems to be a perpetual anxiety in A Course in Miracles. This is indicated in the Inventory table by the minus between brackets (−) on the Questions 2, 3 and 4. The plusses signify the strong emic denials in ACiM of any suggestion of sin, evil, divine-human separation, and even of human enmity among each other. All these phenomena are deemed illusory and have no place in the otherworldly reality of the Sonship or Kingdom of God. Nonetheless, as etic observer, I have added a minus to these questions in order to indicate a profound ambiguity that is tangible as a sort of stress in the ACiM belief system. It appears that the straightforward emic negation of all evil, including the ontological exclusion of sin, is by no means a watertight protection against nagging uncertainties of many kind: psychological (ii), anthropological (iii), and logical (i). The theological aspect will be discussed in relation to the third element of the sin relationship (below 6.3.3.b).

(i) To begin with the latter, logically, reservations can be made with respect to inner consistency in ACiM. There is no rational logic in taking a belief entirely seriously when the content or object of this belief, namely sin, is simultaneously denied. Given the ontological exclusivity of the mind (4.1.a) and the principle of ‘creating your own reality’, the belief is eo ipso “making” its object (sin). Denying the very object subsequently does not appear as coherent. The denial is, of course, based on the assumption that any form of believed ‘sin’ is an illusion, based on error. But then the question remains: why would one take so much pains to deny a defined illusion? Anyhow, on the basis of the exclusive priority of the mind, it is hard to tell the difference between a ‘real sin’, an ‘illusory perception of sin’, and, on account of this, the belief or ac-

5 Psychologically, it can make sense, of course, but my point of interest now is the inner logic and consistency ontologically (as well as theologically). The psychological aspect will be addressed below.
ceptance of this perception as real. But even though logic and inner consistency are of major importance, the human psyche often follows other ‘reasons’.

(ii) Thus, psychological uncertainties are tangible in the stress and tension surrounding both the (illusory) belief in sin and the Course’s painstaking denial of the reality of sin. The question that prompts itself is why the possibility of sin is considered such a fearful thought - even to the extent that the ‘belief’ in sin is identified with the “devil”? (4.2.b). Apparently, the notion of sin as such, and even more the presumed irreversible character of hypothetically realized sin, are frightening ideas in the perspective of ACiM. Real sin would mean an actual violation of the reality God created. A human being would be able to “make himself what God created not” (4.2.d). It would suggest the reality of an opposing power, beyond God and even mightier: a power of nothingness. But the reality of such a ‘power’ is absolutely denied in ACiM. At this point, there is some analogy with the doctrine of Nothingness (das Nichtige) by Karl Barth (below 7.2.1.a). Within ACiM’s monistic ontology stating a holistic unity of love (4.1.b), this opposing and inimical power, if real, would have to be situated in the very bosom of God himself, God thus being “partly sane, and partially insane”. What seems to be regarded as the most disturbing element from the ACiM perspective is that ‘real’ sin would imply a splitting war within the Sonship, destroying its integrity (4.2.d.). It would involve the attack of brother against brother, of son against the Father, of mind against mind. Accepting sin as real would (intrinsically) destroy the essential wholeness of the one divine-human reality, the Kingdom of God would be broken. Moreover, such destruction would be irreversible according to the Course. It would make my mind guilty for ever.6 Both anxieties – sin being a spiritual and thus real offence of mind against mind and the eternally, irreparable or unforgivable result – inadvertently remind one of the theological distinction of mortal versus venial sins and, more specifically, of the so-called sin against the Holy Spirit.7 It appears that the central motif, materialized in the massive onto-theological adoption of loving wholeness and underscored by the negation of sin, is intertwined with profound onto-psycho logical anxieties. The experience of uneasy fear for separation and threatening irreversibility is expressed in emphatic denials. The idea of a possible affront to or turning your mind against God, is deemed entirely illusory.

So far, and presented in this way, the ACiM hamartiology appears as commensurable to and (!) as a straight denial of traditional sin as defined by Plantinga. The question can even be asked whether ACiM’s denial of sin could have any meaning without the Christian doctrine as pièce de résistance. Anyhow, both opposing perspectives agree that the notion of human opposition against God (i.e., sin), if real, represents or would represent a serious religious problem. In the perspective of ACiM, the evil of sin – if supposed to be real - even appears as infinitely greater than in the traditional Christian view. The split in reality caused by sin would be a disaster beyond repair. But then, any perception of one’s separation from, not to speak of one’s “culpable and personal affront to” God or to any part of the Sonship is deemed illusory in terms of the monistic ontology of the Course. Sin simply cannot become a reality in the ACiM

6 Cf. Sin versus Error, T-19.II (374ff), also above, 4.2.d.
7 Cf. Matthew 12,31f. (par.): I tell you that any sinful thing you do or say can be forgiven. Even if you speak against the Son of Man, you can be forgiven. But if you speak against the Holy Spirit, you can never be forgiven, either in this life or in the life to come. See also Barth’s exegesis of Hebr. 6: CD IV/2, 568ff (= KD 642ff)).
perspective, it is so to speak ‘ontologized away’. Below, in the paragraph on Tillich (8.2.2.b) we will meet a similar expression, though with different implication.

(iii) However, the ontological *a priori* of indestructible unity (4.1.b; 4.2.a), and its implicit denial of any split or separation in reality (4.2.b) can only be maintained in combination with the *anthropological* dissolution or negation of the ego. Emphasizing the non-reality of me as ego – which is omnipresent in *ACIM* – is tantamount to the denial of me as an individual person. When humans are seen as inalienable parts of the holistic Kingdom of God, integral partners in the all-sharing brotherhood of the Sonship, then the perception of humans as individual beings, as separated persons becomes a problem. Therefore, the individual existence of authentic human persons, living in distinction from God as well as from other members of the Sonship (4.2.b, c), is not acknowledged in the Course. Correspondingly, the idea of being an individual soul is ignored (4.2.b), certainly not valued positively, and actually feared. To the extent that being an individual person requires at least some measure of separation, recognizable and identifiable personhood would introduce duality and destroy the pre-supposed *advaita* or non-dual reality. Really, the *ACIM* (thé-) ontology presents us with two anthropological options that mutually exclude each other. Either you are a loving brother within the Sonship; or you are a separated individual. In the latter case, however, as ego you have no genuine reality. You may aspire to perceive yourself as an individual, as a distinguishable, separated human person, but this will only amount to illusory (dualistic, antagonistic) existence without real (spiritual, loving) being. The anthropology describing you as ego person is seen as a “fearful thought” (4.4.2.c) which is deactivated in *ACIM* by declaring it an illusion. Is appears to me that the unmistakable anxiety in the Course is the ‘dark’ side of a deep yearning for indelible unity and undisturbed *harmonious love*. The tension tends to downplay the individual person with his or her own unique qualities, hurts and aspirations to such an extent that the ideal of becoming an authentic, responsible, autonomous person appears as something the spiritual ‘author’ behind the *ACIM* is profoundly afraid of.

Correspondingly, Anton van Harskamp localized and discussed the *ACIM* anthropology within the context of (post-)modern individualism, especially concerning the individual’s quest for authenticity and self-realization within or over-against the outer world. According to Van Harskamp *ACIM* tries to respond to the terrible existential dilemma between the never ending quest within and the attempt to survive as a radically individualized person in the continuous struggle with others. The core idea of the eternal and changeless wholeness of the Sonship and its implication of the unreality of hate and fear reveal, according to Van Harskamp, a genuine need for forgiveness, and more significantly, a hidden obsession with guilt.

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8 Van Harskamp, *Nieuw-religieuze Verlangen*, 128-134. The pages 66-74 deal with the “ravaging question for the human self” (*De verscheurende vraag naar het ‘zelf’*).

9 Van Harskamp, o.c., 131: *ACIM* describes “de situatie van het individu dat verscheurd wordt door aan de ene kant de nooit eindigende tocht naar binnen en aan de andere kant de poging om als radicaal verenkeld individu, altijd in de strijd met andere individuen in de buitenwereld staande te blijven”.

10 The core idea of *ACIM* is described by Van Harskamp as: your own little self is always an adopted part within the encompassing Self of God making the worldly hostility unreal (o.c., 131: “je ‘kleine zelf’ is altijd al opgenomen in het grote ‘Zelf’ van God, wat maakt dat de vijandschap van de wereld niet echt is”.

11 Van Harskamp, o.c., 133: een heimelijke obsessie met schuld.
of which guilt is a part. And if we are to speak of a hidden obsession, or rather a most central inner anxiety, I would stick to the all-pervading denial of separation, the anxiousness with which any division of mind against mind is negated; the fear for enmity, and the frightening anxiety that any personal antagonism implies eternal split and divorce. Significantly, ACiM does never teach its students to engage in—what I would call a healthy—personal confrontation with others. This may very well point back to anxieties that belong to individuation-participation process as Van Harskamp observes, especially to the uncertainties that belong to the (post-)modern ideal of individual personality. Seen from the core perspective of ACiM, becoming and being an autonomous, individual ‘self’ is a frightening thing, since it demands some form of separation which in the ACiM belief would imply damage and destruction beyond repair.

In the light of the Plantinga definition of sin, however, a minimum of opposition is needed which in turn requires a minimum of separate individual personality in order to be able to affront someone else, whether the offended object is a human or a deity. But through the marginalization of the ego as an illusion—which is actually its deletion—it seems, finally, that sin, on the side of the human actor, is also ‘anthropologized away’ in ACiM.

6.3.2.c Fox

Concerning the element of opposition as well as with respect to human personhood, Fox’s ideas bear no problem, since in no sense did he deny or dissolve the concrete objectifiable human person. Neither did he deny the reality of antagonistic or inimical opposition. However, he localized this opposition primarily between the human being and the rest of creation (see below 6.3.3.c).

6.3.2.d Conclusion and agenda

The exploration of the sources Roberts and ACiM make clear two things with respect to the possibility of all evil and raise a new question. It appears firstly that without some form of separation, duality or opposition there is no sense in speaking of evil, either natural, moral or religious; secondly, that some sense of outwardly recognizable, identifiable personhood, is necessary in order to get a situation of separation, duality or opposition. Consequently, denying or dissolving individual personhood, implies dissolving (evading) or denying (the possibility of) sin. Now this being true, a new question has gradually become urgent, namely what do we mean by (human) personhood. Some clarity concerning what we have in mind when using and attributing the words person, personal, and derivatives, is all the more vital, since the very notion is also used with regard to God. For the time being, I will just follow the way, the notion is used by the sources, including the theologians to be explored below. But after that, in the second intermediary paragraph (§ 9), I will include an intermezzo on personhood and consider some main historical perspectives on personhood for orientation, in order to localize the perspectives on personhood as implied by the sources and possibly find a concept that can help understanding and reformulating the concept of sin.

6.3.3 The personal God

Plantinga’s definition of sin serves as archetypal example of Christian doctrine of sin. Its third structural element implies that, in order to define a human activity as sin, one needs a deity, in particular a “personal God” as the aggrieved party or object. But
what sort of ‘action’ can we call sin, if the reality of an extra-mundane\textsuperscript{12} personal God is not professed or even explicitly rejected?

\textbf{6.3.3.a Roberts}

Roberts scores negative on all three elements in the sin relationship. As there is no identifiable person with some definable continuity, there is nothing of a “God individual” either. Consequently, there can be no sinful opposition as there is no personal opposite we can sin against, neither a God who can judge our action as sinful affront against him (3.2.2.d). Sin simply is no option within her paradigm. In her view of life there is neither wrong nor evil.

\textbf{6.3.3.b ACIM}

According to Plantinga, the theological aspect in the sin relationship concerns the one who is supposed to be affronted or aggrieved by sin: the personal God. To the corresponding entry (d) in the Inventory table I have entered a plus/minus, indicating an unmistakable ambivalence in the \textit{ACIM} belief system. On the one hand, God is not denied to be in some sense personal, since he is designated as the loving Father of the Sonship. A remarkable example is that – notwithstanding all denials of sin - the belief in sin is described by the Course as “powerful, active, destructive and clearly in opposition to God, because it literally denies His Fatherhood” (4.2.e).\textsuperscript{13} On the other hand, God as Father is certainly not seen as a person who is ontologically or spiritually different from his children, or standing separately over against them (see 4.4.2.d). Instead he is designated as the Father within the whole of the Sonship. The father-son imagery is meant to emphasize unity rather than distinction. As his “sons” (daughters included) we relate to him in a way, one cannot fail to associate with the way Christ relates to the Father within the holy Trinity. The Nicene Creed proclaims of the Son of God that he is “eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one being with the Father”\textsuperscript{14}. Actually, these lines from Nicaea could literally be used in \textit{ACIM} with regard to all ‘sons’ of the Sonship.

According to trinitarian thinking, we can say that the Christ or eternal Son did never really leave the Father not even during his incarnation when united with Jesus of Nazareth. Now similar to the never failing two- or even threesome unity within the Trinity, \textit{ACIM} teaches the multi-unity of God and all his human sons, who are all begotten from God through extension\textsuperscript{14}, together forming the Sonship. We never left and will never leave the one and only true reality of God’s Sonship, since there is, was and will be no (spiritual) separation between the Father and one of us (4.2.d). Consequently, there can be no sin. It appears that the deepest ‘cause’ in \textit{ACIM}’s denial of sin is not its denial (or symbolical acceptance) of separate (extramundane) personhood of God, but rather the central conviction that being part of the Sonship seems to exclude any form of separate, individual personhood. There are no individual ego-persons in the Sonship.

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} Extra-mundane or at least in some sense separate and distinguishable from the human counterpart.
\item \textsuperscript{13} T-3.VII.5 (45); the readers of \textit{ACIM} are further reprimanded: “Look at your life and see what the devil has made”.
\item \textsuperscript{14} The Creed’s word “begotten” comes fairly close to what in \textit{ACIM} is designated as “extension”. We are all “created” according to \textit{ACIM} through extension (4.1.c). Important to note that “to create” is explicitly not meant as to “make”, but indeed as extension. N.B.: the Holy Spirit is also presented as an extension of God (4.3.b).
\end{itemize}
Moreover, if someone would hypothetically conceive of an element of separation (sin), even then, the abandoned or aggrieved object would not be a separated or trans-mundane God-individual, but the indivisible wholeness of the Sonship, including God and all of his Kingdom. The statement of the unchangeable, onto-theological union with God implies the possibility of sin as inconceivable. Apparently, a father can never quit being a father, not even God can. Neither can a son quit being a son. Although the person-like imagery of the father-son relation is used, both images are not to be considered as referring to a relationship of separated subjects or persons. Rather they symbolize an unbreakable, ontological tie. The strength and weakness of the ACiM perspective can be illustrated with the parable of the Father and his two sons (Luke 15, 11ff). On the one hand it seems defendable, at least fully in line with the ACiM-perspective to say that the youngest, the prodigal one, never really left his father and that the father never really left him. Much more disturbing, on the other hand, and impossible to explain from the ACiM point of view is the elder son’s refusal to join the party in celebrating the father-son unity which according to the Course can never be broken.

6.3.3.c The exception offered by Fox

Although Fox, with his rejection of theism and its image of an extra-mundane God, stands close to the corresponding views of Roberts and ACiM, he draws a precisely reverse conclusion with respect to sin. Whereas both ACiM and Roberts deny all forms of evil including sin, Fox knows of only one thing ugly or evil, namely human sin which he identifies as egoistic human abuse, misuse, or even lax neglect of (some part or aspect of) creation (5.2.e; 5.3.b). His perspective seems to be at odds, firstly, with hamartiology in general (i), since what he calls sin, is not directly or outwardly anti divine, but anti cosmic. Secondly, there is divergence from the Plantinga notion in particular (ii), since what Fox calls sin is not explicitly directed against a personal God.

(i) Now the general question can be answered by acknowledging that what Fox designates as anti-cosmic is simultaneously anti-divine, namely to the extent that the indwelling divinity in all creation, the divine Word or Cosmic Christ is disrespected or harmed. Actually, by consistently referring to the ‘cosmic’ Christ, Fox has readdressed and revitalized a longstanding tradition, present in Scripture and history of theology (see 5.1.e). In this tradition, present in the (pseudo-)Pauline letters, Irenaeus and Calvin, the ‘Christ’ is the second prospopon in the holy Trinity, also designated as the ‘Son of God’, ‘eternal Word’ or logos asarkos. As such the ‘Christ’ is seen in distinction from the human ‘Jesus’. In this tradition the Christ is described as creation-mediator and sustainer. Especially Calvin tended to prolong this special office of the ‘Christ’ even after and apart from His/Its incarnation in the human nature (thus extra carnem) which is fairly compatible if not convergent with Fox’s use of the Cosmic Christ. In fact, we can say that Fox has enlarged and generalized the cause of Calvin’s extra Calvinisticum. For Fox, the work of the divine Word, the Cosmic Christ is the “holy omnipresence of the Divine One in all things” implying that God is present and active and can be experienced in all things (5.1.c). Thus, he could see the world as “primary sacrament” (5.1.d), implying that meeting with something existent in the outer world is simultaneously meeting with the Creator. If, in Fox’s words “exploring the cosmos is exploring God”, then harming the cosmos is harming God which qualifies for sin. But is it also harming the personal God?

(ii) This leads us to the second question, to be raised more in particular from the Plantinga point of view with its emphasis on the “personal God”: is sin against the
divine immanence in all things, is harming the Cosmic Christ harming the personal God?

It occurs to me that, so far and inadvertently, I have looked upon Fox’s central notion rather as a principle than a person. But when the Cosmic Christ is actually identified with the second ‘person’ (prosopon) of the holy Trinity: what are the implications? What kind of prosopon does Fox have in mind? Does he see his central theologoumenon as a person, as some-one? Or rather as a principle, as some-thing. Although the latter option may seem anathema from a trinitarian-theological point of view, the question inevitably comes up from the various ways Fox makes use of his notion, the universal variety of the Cosmic Christ’s operation, role, and meaning. Especially when originally speaking of the divine Dabhar, the association with an enlivening and instructive ‘principle’ or ‘something’ - the Word of God as a spiritual sort of DNA in all things - lies more at hand than with ‘person’. The divine Word is explained as “one flow … one divine word in the sense of one creative energy flowing through all things, all time, all space …”. (OB, 38f). The incarnation of this driving force of creative divine energy in Jesus is unique, in the sense of unsurpassed, but not exclusive, since God’s dynamic Word permeates other humans as well. In fact, divine Dabhar enlivens and indwells anything created, the entire cosmos, all its parts. (5.1.b). And apart from the term Cosmic Christ, says Fox, there are other biblical equivalents, like the “kingdom/queendom of God … among you”, or Emmanuel, the divine “One who is with us” (5.1.c). In these biblical alternatives, the association alternates between principle and person. Clearly, Fox has rigged up God’s energetic Dabhar with person-like features, to begin with by calling it Cosmic Christ, thus linking it with the second prosopon in the Trinity. In Jesus, Gods word or Christ “wishes” to be incarnate in us, according to Fox. In him, the principle or dynamic power of Gods creative energy “has become one of us” (5.1.b). Proceeding from here, Fox sees us all as royal, godly, divine persons, since we “are all Cosmic Christs, other Christs”17. Moreover, we should become “mothers of God”, who foster or even “birth the Cosmic Christ in self and society”. Thus, we not only co-create with God as mutual partners, we’re also called to co-create God, to accumulate, enhance and increase the godly creative principle of the Cosmic Christ (5.3.a).

For now, I note that Fox did present his theological core notion sometimes as more person-like, but mostly as an all pervading principle. When personality connotations have the upper hand, the designation Cosmic Christ comes very close to the divine-human Jesus Christ. Most often, however, the Cosmic Christ appears not predominantly as some-one but as some-thing, as principle: in OB designated as all permeating divine Word, in CCC identified as cosmic Christ, and finally in CDH supplemented and fused with divine Spirit (5.3.b). But in whatever form or shape divinity manifests itself, whether as ‘Word’, ‘Christ’, or ‘Spirit’, in all cases the Deity needs an indirect object to dawn upon, a ‘substance’ like a human subject or person to work upon or inspire. Moreover, and in turn, divinity needs to be carried itself by its object, needs to be affirmed and furthered itself by the human subject or person it inspires. Divine Word, Anointment and Spirit, all need a human heart or person to be repre-

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15 A principle or something may be: an enlivening power or spirit; a sort of spiritual DNA: an all permeating value, law, or ideal; rule or virtue, an unconditional passion …
16 Especially in relation to the trinitarian formulation of “one substance, three persons” (see § 9).
17 CCC, 136f.
sented by and advanced in outer existence. God and his creativity not only descend on (human) subjects but depend on them as well.

6.4 ConClusions

Having explored the New Age sources with regard to the three structural elements of sin, I conclude that Roberts denies all three, whereas in ACiM at least two (human-divine opposition and human personhood) are denied. By contrast, Fox fully acknowledges the concrete living human person and emphasized the actuality of harmful opposition caused by humans. But according to him this counteraction is not necessarily directed against a personal God, but against a principle, against something of God present in all things, namely the Cosmic Christ.

Both Roberts and ACiM put all emphasis on spiritual, divine reality. They actually trivialize outer (physical) reality. As part of this, they also have little to no use for the outer person, they denied the ego its substantial reality. But what they saw as the genuine person, namely the inner self or soul, was blurred by them into an ethereal, ever changing and indefinable entity. In place of their (exclusive) emphasis on interiority, Fox explicitly wants to combine the inner and outer aspect of human reality. He envisions spiritual and natural-physical reality in close connection to one another, and in mutual dependency.

By contrast, the first two sources granted self-sufficient and supreme autonomy to the reality of spirit. According to them, inner divinity develops autonomously, and is neither disturbed, nor aided by outer reality. It is with our conscious-spiritual mind that we create our own reality. With Fox, however, the concrete human being, the outer person is not only an inalienable part of human identity but also has an indispensable role in the divine life. Plantinga’s viewpoint that sin is aimed against the personal God is not shared by Fox. Therefore, the question ‘person or principle’ with respect to the divine element or God will be kept in mind when exploring the theologians. And the question of personhood on the basis of a brief acquaintance with some main concepts of person will receive explicit attention in the second intermediate paragraph (§9).
PART THREE: TWO THEOLOGICAL HALLMARKS
OF THE 20TH CENTURY

The previous analysis of the three New Age sources has largely confirmed the existence of the two central themes assumed in the main Introduction, firstly a holistic and close connection between the human and the divine, between the Creator and creation expressed in the esoteric theme of the co-eternity of creation with God. Secondly, in various ways they share the affirmation of a conscious and creative human potential, associated with the notion of inner gnosis. Both themes are closely connected and can be seen as a positive counterpart to a critical stand towards traditional theology, in particular, regarding doctrines of sin, in which the opposition between God and the human being is stressed and the human potential is neglected or even explicitly denied. I will now investigate whether this criticism holds true with regard to two major voices of theology of the last century, Barth and Tillich. Both have had great and imponderable influence on theological thinking. Both wrote extensively and repeatedly on all the relevant issues. Their respective theologies are oppositely oriented and can largely be seen as complementary which, taken together, makes them fit to represent the broad field of regular theology, that is, in the hemisphere of Western Christianity. Starting with the divine initiative of revelation called the Word of God, Barth predominantly emphasized the critical, dualistic character of the divine-human relationship. Tillich saw the divine and the human connected in a more mutual relationship of correlation.

Both will be approached in light of the two central themes already mentioned and along the same trails that we have followed so far, concentrating on the three main elements of cosmology, hamartiology and human potential. Firstly, I will turn to the theologian who became famous after the Great War (1914-18) for the firm and critical stand he dared to take over against common culture as well as against both traditional and popular religion (§7. Karl Barth). Secondly, I will study his fellow countryman who was expelled from his post under the influence of the Nazis, then emigrated to the United States of America and became famous for his openness to and imaginative interaction with the culture at large (§ 8. Paul Tillich).

§ 7. Karl Barth (1886-1968)

Introduction

At first thought it may seem rather hopeless to initiate a dialogue between Karl Barth and supporters of New Age religion on the issues of divine-human vicinity and human potential. I will use this introduction to draw some clear points of divergence but also to show some apparent points at which commensuration presents itself. Divergence appears as unbridgeable when we concentrate on Barth’s known criticism about “the sinister aspect of all religious history”1 and his view on human sin as pride (Hochmut), in which humans pretend to be or take for themselves what, according to Barth, they only have, and in some way, already are, in Jesus Christ. The threefold elaboration of the “man of sin” (Mensch der Sünde)

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1 Cf. Church Dogmatics (CD) IV/1,490 (546: “das unheimliche Schauspiel der ganzen Religionsgeschichte”) - References will be made to CD. For convenience sake, I will add the corresponding page numbers in the German original, the Kirchliche Dogmatik (KD), in brackets.
within the context of Barth’s extensive doctrine of reconciliation\(^2\) can be read as a long refutation of religious aspiration in general and of a supposedly divine-like, human potential in particular. In fact, beginning with his second Commentary on Romans (1922), Barth’s understanding of the divine-human relationship, of grace as related to the role and potential of the human self, has often been described with the form “God is all, the human being nothing”.\(^3\) Barth distanced himself from this slogan by stating that “in reconciling the world … God is indeed everything but only in order that man may not be nothing …, in order that as such he, too, may be everything in his own place”. Far from eliminating the human role, the atonement in Jesus Christ entails nothing less, says Barth, than “the creating and grounding of a human subject”, taking place “from above”.\(^4\) Although it is unclear whether Barth himself here acknowledges a change of view, it can hardly be denied that in the later parts of Church Dogmatics, he shows more recognition of the human part than in his early work. Thus, by the end of the 1950s, he has explicitly stated that it is the good will of Jesus Christ that we “should not be merely the objects of His action”. Instead, reconciliation entails that we should be with Him “as independently active and free subjects”.\(^5\) Accordingly, Van der Kooi has pointed out that “the larger place which the Enlightenment demanded for the human subject is for Barth no misfortune”. Based on his analysis of Barth’s understanding of baptism, Van der Kooi has observed that the “de-sacramentalisation” implied in Barth’s modern interpretation of sacrament “was intended to give full measure to the answer from man, to his acting”.\(^6\)

With the notion “desacramentalisation” or even “demythologisation”,\(^7\) Van der Kooi refers to Barth’s rejection of ecclesial sacraments other than the one and only sacrament which (according to Barth) should be recognized “in the incarnation, in the nativitas Jesu Christi, in the mystery of Christmas”.\(^8\) Van der Kooi explains Barth’s understanding of sacrament as follows: “The mediation of this one sacrament [namely, Jesus Christ, ffo] is entirely and totally the work of God. The divine and the human become hopelessly mixed if one suggests that in the action of baptism and the Supper something extraordinary, something supra-human, something divine occurs”.\(^9\) Barth wanted to avoid that. Therefore, he “wished to emphatically distinguish baptism with water from baptism with the Spirit. For him water baptism is a secondary element

\(^{2}\) See Church Dogmatics VI/1,2,3. Barth’s doctrine of reconciliation consists of three main parts that largely correlate with the traditional distinction: justification (CD IV/1), sanctification (CD IV/2), and calling/vocation (CD IV/3). Each part has its own specific notion of sin. In the context of justification, sin is described as human pride (§60. The Pride and Fall of Man); in the part on sanctification, sin is framed as human sloth (§ 65. The sloth and misery of man); in the third part, on the calling to witness the divine truth in Christ, sin comes forward as the human denial of this truth, described as the falsehood of man - des Menschen Lüge (§70. The Falsehood and Condemnation of Man). My concern in the present study is primarily with Barth’s notion of sin in the second context (of sanctification).

\(^{3}\) CD IV/1, 89 (94: “Gott Alles, der Mensch Nichts”). According to Jüngel this qualification was “not coined by Barth, but attributed to him – not without cause …”, cf. Jüngel, Karl Barth, theological Legacy, 132 (= translation of Idem, Barthstudien, 239: the qualification was “von Barth zwar nicht selbst geprägt[, ihm aber nicht ganz zu Unrecht ... nachgesagt[”]).

\(^{4}\) Church Dogmatics (CD) IV/1,89f (94f).

\(^{5}\) CD IV/3 (first half, 1959), 332 (383).

\(^{6}\) Van der Kooi, As in a Mirror, 447, 448 (original Dutch: Als in een spiegel, 393, 394).

\(^{7}\) Van der Kooi, o.c., 459 (396); the number in brackets refers to the original Dutch edition.

\(^{8}\) Van der Kooi, o.c., 403 (358), referring to CD IV/2, 55 (59).

\(^{9}\) Van der Kooi, o.c., 403 (358).
in which humans give answer to the new reality created by God”. ¹⁰ Thus, as Van der Kooi expounds further, “the ambiguity that is characteristic of the sacramental acts in Calvin and that is anchored in the classic doctrine of the sacraments is renounced in favour of man as a subject. Baptism is an act of obedience, a first act with which the baptizand acknowledges that he or she wishes to respond to the history of Jesus Christ”. ¹¹ By denying the sacramental or divine character of the visible sacrament, Barth wanted “to take the characteristic nature of the acting of the community and individual believers with utter seriousness”. ¹²

Already before his doctrine of baptism emerged, ¹³ Barth had deliberately and extensively considered the “second problem of the doctrine of reconciliation”, ¹⁴ which is the sanctification of “man” ¹⁵ (des Menschen Heiligung). It is within these confines that he identified sin as slowness or sloth (Trägheit), which may remind us of the basic sin according to Matthew Fox, designated as acedia (5.2.d; 5.3.b). For Barth, sloth is the structural sin in the context of sanctification. That we, ordinary humans, are stuck in sloth is deduced by Barth from comparing us to the only real and genuine human being, Jesus Christ, whom Barth has depicted majestically in the famous section entitled the Royal Man. In connection to him, a human being should be - and in a basic way is – ashamed of himself. In fact, the actual experience of shame, according to Barth, is a ”decisive criterion” for knowing Jesus altogether. ¹⁶ At first sight, this seems to imply that knowing Jesus can only knock us down.

But there is the dialectical fact that these very same notions (sloth and shame) contain a challenging implication. If we are accountable for our sloth, the implication is not only that we should, but what is more, we could do better. Similarly, with regard to shame, one can only really be ashamed of what one is or does under the condition that one can effectively be or act otherwise. Here lies a possible common point with Jane Roberts and Fox. Moreover, according to Barth, a human being can be otherwise. Or even stronger: in Jesus Christ he or she already is a new being. This means that, whether we know it or not, we do possess a “true and actual being” which is “hidden and enclosed and laid up in Him”. ¹⁷ Here one is inadvertently reminded of A Course in Miracles and its view on our true reality. In Christ a human being, according to Barth, already is his/her own subject, endowed with a real and unsuspected potential. This potential is identified by him as Christian freedom. Christian faith, according to Barth, implies a special kind of freedom. It is, in other words, Jesus’ or God’s gift to humans in order to live onto God or for Jesus. Those who are elected in Jesus to associate with God, not only become independent, but in addition, they receive the positive freedom to advance their true being and act accordingly, having the potential to become God’s partners. As such, “they are able and powerful … they are men of unconditional and unlimited capacity”. In short, the believer to whom the freedom of faith is granted by

¹⁰ Van der Kooi, o.c., 407 (362).
¹¹ Van der Kooi, o.c., 408 (363).
¹² Van der Kooi, o.c., 411 (364f).
¹³ CD IV/4, published 1967, a year before his death.
¹⁴ CD IV/2, 10, 9 (9, 8: das “andere Problem der Versöhnungslehre”).
¹⁵ If one is looking for correctness concerning gender differentiation, one will be dissatisfied when reading Barth, especially in the English version which translates der Mensch consequently as “man”.
¹⁶ CD IV/2, 384 (431: ein entscheidendes Kriterium ... dass wir uns schämen)
¹⁷ CD IV/1, 92, 93 (98, 99)
God “can do all … things and do them rightly”. At first glance these high-pitched commendations may be looked upon with envy, even by many a New Ager. Within and with respect to Barth’s own thinking, they seem to imply that the once “permanent crisis between time and eternity”, between God and human beings has reached at least some détente. The question, however, is to what extent this deduction holds true as Barth keeps stressing that the Creator and his creation are “unchangeably unequal”. He never stops disqualifying, as sinful examples of falsehood (Lüge), all attempts at envisioning the divine-human relationship as some kind of “continuous coexistence” or by means of “correlation between God and man”. It is, therefore, necessary to investigate the actual substance of the given Barthian laudation of Christian freedom and to see how this relates to the perspectives on human potential we met in Part Two.

In order to pinpoint Barth’s position on these matters, I will concentrate on his doctrine of Sanctification as established in §66: The Sanctification of Man. This curtailment has two reasons. The one is that, in traditional theology or dogmatics, the theme of sanctification is the locus where the human side of faith comes to the fore. Sanctification as the “second” part of Reconciliation is described by Barth as the problem or question of the (truly) reconciled human being. Who is the one that is really touched and changed? If it is to be found anywhere, then it is most likely here that we may find what Barth has to say about the human subject vis à vis God and about the human potential and part that one may have in her/his own salvation.

The other reason for my restriction is to largely evade questions as to a supposed continuity or discontinuity in Barth’s thinking or, even worse, regarding what the “real” Barth might have meant. Not only would these questions demand a survey of Barth’s writings that would by far surpass the scope of the present chapter, but any given answer to questions of such a kind will always carry a very arbitrary character. Therefore it is not my intention to uncover what Barth ‘really’ has meant, for instance, by Christian freedom, but only to understand what he has actually written down in his paragraph on the Sanctification of Man. In close relation to the ‘questions of research’, I will focus on the following issues: to what extent does Barth allow a human being to become the co-subject or actor of his/her Christian potential? To what extent can we become active participants in the freedom we have been given in the existence of Jesus Christ? These questions will especially come to the fore in the third section (Human Potential) of this paragraph and will be evaluated in § 9.

The major steps in investigating Karl Barth are none other than the ones we have taken with respect to the New Age sources. Thus, I will approach Barth with respect to the fixed elements of 7.1 Cosmology, 7.2 Hamartiology, and 7.3 Human potential. Thereafter, I will determine the results for the Inventory Table (7.4).

18 CD IV/2, 242v (268: Weil der Glaube die dem Menschen durch Gottes Gnade geschenkte Freiheit ist, darum kann der glaubende Mensch Alles und Alles richtig)

19 This “permanent crisis” - according to Barth in his genuinely dialectical or critical period - was the one and only central message of Paul’s Letter to the Romans, cf. Barth, K., Der Römerbrief, Theologischer Verlag: Zürich 1940 (1922), XIV.

20 CD IV/3, 444-446 (512-513).

21 In: CD IV,2; this part of CD is about “the second problem of the doctrine of reconciliation”. If necessary, I will respect the larger context as well.

22 CD IV/2, 9, 10 (8, 9). In fact, Barth refutes a doctrine of grace and reconciliation as unreal which describes man as “only touched outwardly and not changed” (IV/2,10 (9)).
7.1 Cosmology

It takes only a little imagination to let the theological cosmologies of Matthew Fox and Karl Barth converge in Jesus Christ to the extent that both can be called Christocentric. But, whereas with Fox the Cosmic Christ is dispersed and enchantingly present in all creation, in the partly biblical, partly speculative cosmology designed by Barth the perspective is precisely reversed. He sees all creation, or at least all of humanity, as concentrated and contained and, so to speak, epitomized in Jesus Christ. This is because creation according to Barth, together with its origin in the eternal act of divine election, has its primal objective in the royal human being Jesus Christ. It is therefore in him or in the relationship to him that the rest of creation and especially all other humans have their true being. We can know our essential self through analogy with Jesus Christ and with the Triune God, though of course not analogy based on being (analogia entis), but, as Barth saw it, analogy based on faith and on relationship as realized in faith (analogia fidei or relationis). With Barth this perspective amounts to a special ontology or realism which is centred in Christ. It is only in faith and in relation to the God-man Jesus Christ that we receive and may understand what is true and genuinely real: in God, the world and in ourselves.

Firstly, I will draw Barth’s distinctive doctrine of election which he portrays as the origin of creation. Both election and creation imply the great divine Yes to human and outer human reality but in some way, this has also led to what God had never planned. As it were, in the slipstream of His positive election and creation, there appeared an unintended ‘reality’ as well, to which He could only say No (a. Eternal election, Creation and the appearance of Evil). The primordial divine election to create, apparently, resulted in two opposite forms of reality, one that was willed and one that was un-willed, and therefore each with an entirely different ontological standing. In the second subsection I will discuss Barth’s theological ontology of the positively willed part of creation, especially of the true human being of His election. It will appear that Barth’s description of what is genuine and real and originally intended can, in a certain sense, be identified with his Christology (b. The ‘in Christ’ realism). Thirdly, I will concentrate on the actual existence of humans. Over against the divinely willed being we have – according to faith – in Christ, we have in our daily existence a down to earth or de facto reality which cannot be derived from him, our actual being apart from him (c. Human being in Christ and in our selves). Finally, I will discuss the findings in relationship to Barth’s understanding of the doctrine of creation ex nihilo and the two esoteric characteristics (d. ‘Creation from nothing’ and the two esoteric characteristics).

7.1.a. Eternal election, Creation and the appearance of Evil

Shortly after the second World War Barth came with a ground-breaking innovation of the doctrine of election and predestination that can be seen as both “ontic ground and … capstone” of his theology. Strongly diverging from classic presentations of predestination, Barth’s central thesis was that “God’s eternal will is the election of Jesus Christ”. In clear opposition to the notorious image of a neat balance between

23 CD II/2 (1946), especially §33 The Election of Jesus Christ (Die Erwählung Jesu Christi).
25 Cf. CD II/2, 146(157); with this thesis Barth simultaneously made transparant and combined in Jesus Christ.
election and reprobation, Barth emphasized that God’s eternal election of the human being in Christ, and subsequently, creation as its realization in time, has a “positive content, the Yes of predestination”. It is God’s eternal choice for “a being distinct from Himself … as His creature and antithesis (Gegenüber)”, who as such is destined for “participation in His own glory”. The human being “in all its otherness” is ordained “to exist in the brightness of this glory and as the bearer of its image”. God willed humans and elected them with “the promise of eternal life”. Nonetheless, the positive content, the Yes of this election of mutual fellowship, entailed “inevitably that man was foreordained to danger and trouble”. For God had chosen his counterpart with its limitations, i.e., “as a creature which could and would do harm to God by the application, or rather the misuse, of its freedom”. So “man’s susceptibility to temptation and the zero-point of his fall” were included in the divine decree. Of course Barth was well aware of the implication, namely that he seemed to present the Creator of the good creation to be the unintended origin of evil (das Böse) as well. By all means, however, he has taken pains to deny evil any substantial being, either in or beyond God.

Thus, evil is identified by Barth as only being the inevitable “shadow” of God’s positive choice. Evil’s possible existence is that of the “impossible”, its reality of existence is “only that of the unreal”, and its power is “only that of impotence” (170 (185)). The divine willing of evil is thus only the counterpart of His willing the good creation. Therefore, evil has no proper or autonomous basis in God. There is nothing in God to suggest that “evil too were divinely created, as though evil too had in God a divine origin and counterpart”. It only has to be permitted because God “wills not to keep to Himself the light of His glory but to let it shine outside Himself” and to ordain the human being as its “witness” (170 (186)). But Barth maintains that evil does not have any “autonomy and status within the divine economy”. It does not belong there and is excluded and rejected; in short, it has the “autonomy and status of the non-being”, which has its basis and meaning only in its “confrontation and opposition” against all being in the realm of creation. It only exists “as the spirit of constant negation” (170v (186v)). To the extent that creation inevitably implied this nihilistic, evil negation, it also marks the “divine conflict with nothingness which began with creation”. In this conflict humans are not only the “field and prize of the battle”, they are also called to participate in this conflict as “contestant”.

Some years after this radical perspective on election, Barth elaborated further his understanding of collaterally developing evil, especially in the context of his doctrine of creation. Without substantial change, he introduced a new term

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26 CD II/2, 169 (184f); see also McCormack, o.c., 100, stating that in his gracious election “God determined and determines never to be God apart from the human race”.
27 CD II/2, 169 (185); Barth also observes: “In their own way [man’s susceptibility and the possibility of his fall] were even the object of the divine will and choice” (Gegenstand des Wollens und Wählens Gottes).
28 CD II/2, 170 (185); references in this intermezzo refer to CD II/2 (KD)
29 CD IV/2, 398 (447). The notion “nothingness” as alternative to evil was not yet used by Barth in his doctrine of election. See further in the main text.
by designating evil as “das Nichtige”, mostly translated as Nothingness. Evil or Nothingness is pictured as a kind of strange and inimical power to which the human sort has surrendered and which drives us into opposition against God and into contradiction with grace. As such Nothingness can and does become actualized in concrete phenomena as sin, (eternal) death and evil (see 7.2). What concerns us now is the ontological status of Nothingness as related to creation.

Similar to what has been said concerning evil in connection to Election, Nothingness with regard to Creation is “that which God as Creator did not elect or will”. It is that which He “set behind him as chaos (Gen.1,2), not giving it existence or being”. Therefore, it is actual “only in the negativity allotted to it by divine decision, only in its exclusion from creation, only … at the left hand of God”34. However, excluded as it may be in Barth’s perspective, it can hardly be denied that there is an insolubly narrow connection between God’s electing and creative will on the one hand and the appearance of evil/Nothingness on the other35. As Barth observes,

The ontic context (ontische Zusammenhang) in which Nothingness is real is that of God’s activity as grounded in His election … Grounded always in election, the activity of God is invariably one of jealousy, wrath and judgment … His being and activity take place in a definite opposition, in a real negation … Nothingness is that from which God separates Himself and in face of which He asserts Himself and exerts His positive will. … Nothingness has no existence and cannot be known except as the object (Gegenstand) of God’s activity … God elects, and therefore rejects what He does not elect. … He says Yes, and therefore says No to that to which He has not said Yes. He works according to His purpose and in so doing rejects and dismisses all that gainsays it. Both of these activities, grounded in his election and decision, are necessary elements in His sovereign action. He is Lord on the right hand and on the left. It is only on this basis that Nothingness “is”, but on this basis it really “is”. … He is the basis and Lord of Nothingness too. Consequently, it is not adventitious. It is not a second God, nor self-created. It has no power save that which it is allowed by God. It too belongs to God.

30 See CD III/3 (1950), § 50 God and Nothingness. Barth seems to have found the term “Nichtige” in Heidegger’s inaugural lecture in Freiburg in Breisgau (1929) entitled “Was ist Metaphysik?”, see CD III/3, 334 (384). For a discussion of both affinity and divergence between Barth’s notion of nothingness and Hegel’s view of evil, see Krötke, Sünde und Nichtiges bei Karl Barth, 29f.

31 Other, though less frequent translations are: “that which is not”, “evil”, “nullity” (Nichtigkeit). I (ffo) will generally stick to ‘Nothingness’ (with a capital) as equivalent to das Nichtige.

32 The English translation has some lacunae, compare CD III/3, 357: „The grace of God does not stop short …“ with its parallel in KD, 412: „Nun macht also seine Gnade nicht halt vor dem gnadenfremden, gnadenwidrigen, gnadenlosen Wesen dem sich sein Geschöpf (wider die Natur, die er ihm gegeben und wider die Freiheit, zu der er es bestimmte!) ausgeliefert hat“; see also Krötke, Sünde und Nichtiges, 18: “Der Mensch wartet mit einer Macht im Rücken gegen Gott auf. Diese Macht nennt Barth das Nichtige”.

33 Cf. CD III/3, 74 (84). To the sphere of Nothingness (that which is not) belongs “the devil, the father of lies. … the world of demons, and sin and evil and death – not death as natural limitation, but eternal death, the enemy and annihilator of life”.

34 CD III/3, 73v (84). God created “by distinguishing that which He willed from that which He did not will, and by giving it existence on the basis of that distinction” (73 (83)). Important element in Barth’s perspective on creation is that “by preserving the distinction God preserves the creature” (73 (84)).

35 CD III/3, 74 (84): “The power of God extends even over this sphere [that is, over Nothingness, namely through the dominion of ‘His left hand’], for apart from His creative act it certainly would never have had or been this negative actuality”.

36 CD III/3, 351 (405).
The statement that Nothingness exists and is knowable only as the "object (Gegenstand) of God’s activity" illustrates the close connectedness of Nothingness with God so that one can hardly escape the association with Hegel but Barth drew his own lines. God’s acting consists primarily of his positive election, his saying Yes to the object of his choosing; creation then is its consequent realization in time. This is, as Barth puts it, His opus proprium. But saying Yes inevitably implies saying No, the rejection of that which God does not want. This implies his "jealousy, wrath and judgment", which is His opus alienum. The implication is that both ‘creation’ - as the object of His Yes - and Nothingness - as the unwilling target of His No - are "necessary elements" of His mighty action. Apart from this divine action, Nothingness has no independent being. It is not a second power or a second god. All it has and all it is derives itself from God. Barth seems particularly determined to evade any form of dualism but, in doing so, he evidently evokes a suggestion of some form of monism. Being the Creator of what he positively chose to create, God appears to some extent as the unintended author, or at least instigator, of Nothingness as well.

In the context of election (II/2) Barth had denied that, like creation, evil too has “in God a divine origin and counterpart”. But in the context of his doctrine of creation (III/3), he states that God’s rejection has no less grounding power than his Yes; that God’s No gives rise to a "real dimension" as well. In fact, it gives “existence and form ... to a reality sui generis”, now termed Nothingness (das Nichtige). Still - and more or less contrarious to the "ontic connection" - it is also stressed by Barth that God is “wholly and utterly not the Creator in this respect”. Clearly, he wants to avoid monism as well, although at this stage, his rejection of dualism is more pronounced. A separate origin, independent from divine election and creation, would grant evil or Nothingness an autonomous being apart from God. Therefore, there must be an “ontic context (Zusammenhang)”, a dependency of evil as in some way the result and indirect “object (Gegenstand) of God’s activity”. Evil, according to Barth, has no separate ontological standing whatsoever, apart from the in it self only positive election and creation by God.

The risk of such dialectical discourse, of course, is that the harder one tries to escape dualism, the more one risks ending up in the monism of which Barth has indeed been accused. I will show, however, that Barth is equally opposed to ontological

37 For a discussion of both affinity and divergence between Barth’s notion of Nothingness and Hegel’s view of evil, see Krötke, Sünde und Nichtiges bei Karl Barth, 29f.
38 Cf. the notions opus proprium/alienum: CD III/3, 353ff (407ff).
39 Cf. CD III/3, 361 (417): The opus alienum of God’s rejection is “inevitable, i.e. as the obverse of the divine election and affirmation” (unvermeidlich – als Kehrseite des göttlichen Erwählens und Bejahens nämlich). But though inevitable “it is nevertheless as such a basically contingent and transient activity” according to Barth.
40 See above; reference to CD II/2, 170 (186).
41 CD III/3,352 (405): “His rejection … and dismissal are powerful and effective like all His works because they, too, are grounded in Himself, in the freedom and wisdom of His election” (Er handelt auch nach dieser (=linken) Seite nicht ins Leere. Sondern mächtig begründet, weil in ihm selbst ... begründet, ... ist auch sein Verwerfen ...”)
42 CD III/3: “That which God renounces and abandons in virtue of His decision is not merely nothing. It is nothingness, and has as such its own being, albeit malignant and perverse. A real dimension is disclosed, and existence and form are given to a reality sui generis, in the fact that God is wholly and utterly not the Creator in this respect”.
43 See Krötke, W., Sünde und Nichtiges, 107ff, discussing several forms of alleged “monism” for which Barth has been criticized. Basically these criticisms have to do with Barth’s doctrine of Nothingness.
monism as he is to dualism. This appears clearly when he pairs his rendering of ontic connection with a strong antithesis in a qualitative sense. The basic quality or character of evil or Nothingness according to Barth is diametrically opposed to God.\textsuperscript{44} This anti-monistic qualitative aspect will be discussed in the context of Hamartiology (7.2.1.a-b).

So far, the conclusion with respect to the Creator-creation relationship in general is that creation is not co-eternal with God. We can only say that creation and Nothingness are co-original, both having their starting point in divine election. With respect to the divine-human relation, Barth has claimed a clear distinction or duality between God and his creation. As regards the creation of human beings, he observed that God did not opt for “a second god side by side with Himself”. Instead, a clear “antithesis (Gegenüber)” is envisioned as between two personal entities that are unambiguously separate. Below we will see that, to the extent that Nothingness gets hold of humans, the divine-human antithesis becomes even fiercely contrarious. This, however, must not obscure that the human creature is most basically meant to participate in the divine glory and to carry its image.\textsuperscript{45} As we will see, it is not in a remote future that we are destined to participate in the divine glory but instead, according to Barth, right now we already do. This brings us to the next subsection on Barth’s special ontology or ontologia fidei.

7.1.b. The ‘in Christ’ realism

In a preliminary paragraph to the vast landscape of Reconciliation, Barth did postulate a far-reaching presupposition which is highly illustrative, not only concerning his ontology but from there, also with respect to his understanding of valid anthropology. He opens the section on The being of man in Jesus Christ (§58,2) as follows: “We cannot speak of the being of man except from the standpoint of the Christian and in the light of the particular being of man in Jesus Christ”.\textsuperscript{46} The implication is that adequate anthropology is supposed to depend on Christology.\textsuperscript{47} True
knowledge of our real human self can only be found “in Christ”. It cannot be gained from ordinary human existence but from the one event which is the existence of the one human being, Jesus Christ. It is only in Him that true humanity is revealed. In fact, we meet here an application of the famous *analogia fidei* (or *relationis*), namely with respect to anthropology.

*Analogia fidei* or *relationis* is Barth’s alternative to natural theology and its basic principle of *analogia entis*. The latter presupposes a common being of the analogans (God) and the analogatum (human being) more or less as a matter of fact. Barth’s objection is primarily directed against this habitual or ‘matter of fact’-character. As such, *analogia entis* has always been misused by religious men in order to pinpoint God from below and after their own fashion, comparable to the misuse of the given law in legalism. In contrast, *analogia fidei* does point to a likeness or common being which 1. is constituted from above and granted by God to man; 2. as such has the character of an event (*Ereignischarakter*), i.e., it is only actual when and as long as it happens; and 3. is not primarily a likeness of being or of certain attributes, but of relationships, therefore *analogia relationis*. By this Barth means that the divine, that is, inner-trinitarian relationships are repeated and represented by God in His *opera ad extra*. So, the eternal love between the Father and the Son constitutes its analogy or likeness in the love and fellowship of Jesus to humans and this, correspondingly, constitutes analogous relationships among humankind. All this is very aptly illustrated in the prayer of Jesus in John 17, for example in vs. 21f: “I want all of them to be one with each other, just as I am one with you and you are one with me. I also want them to be one with us (...) in order that they may be one with each other, just as we are one”. In this way says Barth, “schafft das göttliche Urbild sich selbst sein Gegenbild in der Kreaturwelt”. If then the perspective of *analogia fidei* is put into anthropological practice, the result is a basically theological or Christological anthropology.

The anthropological relevance implied in the “ontological connection” between Jesus and all humans comes down to the belief that Jesus Christ is the fundamental truth for all of humankind: in him God has brought to stage and realized “the new being of all men”. It is in the human person Jesus that believers and unbelievers encounter their “true and actual being as it is hidden and enclosed and laid up for them in Him”. In connection to Him, the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian is purely noetic. It is only contingent that the latter’s ears, eyes and hearts are not yet opened, whereas the former knows it and can declare what it is that belongs to him and to all

48 Barth is very generous with the notion “in Christ”. On the first full page of section §58,2 (The being of man in Jesus Christ) the notions “in Jesus Christ” or “in Him” occur over twenty times, see *CD IV/1* 92v (98v).

49 As has been elaborated extensively in *CD III/2* and shortly restated in *CD IV/2*, 27 (27f). See also Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 402 (357f), discerning the same “ontological connection between Jesus Christ … and all other human beings” in his analysis of Barth’s doctrine of Baptism (*CD IV/4*).

50 *KD* III/2, 264. The issue of analogy of faith versus analogy of being was hotly debated in the 1950s. Criticism was raised especially by catholic theologians as G. Söghen and H.U. von Balthasar (*Karl Barth. Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie*), arguing that Barth’s *analogia fidei* is only possible with *analogia entis* as its underlying basis. Barth found himself a very sophisticated advocate in Eberhard Jüngel. In an early article Jüngel is combining severe abstraction with surprising simplicity, epitomizing the matter of analogy in linguistic terms as follows: “Gott spricht - der Mensch entspricht. So ist er imago dei. So ist theologische Anthropologie möglich”, see: Jüngel, “Möglichkeit theologischer Anthropologie …”. (1962), in: *id.*, *Barthstudien*, 226.

51 The professed “ontological character” of Christological-anthropological statements referred to above is reaffirmed in *CD IV/2*, 281 (311).
other humans in Jesus Christ. It appears that Jesus Christ represents an ontological inseparableness of Christian and non-Christian, of believers and non-believers. The question to be raised is what the purport of this ontological connectedness actually is.

For Barth the basis of this ontological determination of all humanity is, again, to be found in the eternal Election. When God chose to create human beings as distinguished from and as His antithesis (Gegenüber), He actually chose for the human being that became realized in existence, in the God-man Jesus Christ. Thus, the human being, as originally elected and intended by God, is ‘primarily’ Jesus Christ. My choice of the word ‘primarily’ is probably not strong enough, because Barth has also emphasized that real humanity is realized in the One elected, in Jesus Christ only. In his own words: “the new being of all men” is to be “found … exclusively in Him”. There is a paradoxical (or just odd) tension between “all” and “exclusively”. What does it mean when this “being of the new man reconciled with God … has truly and actually been appropriated … to all men” when, simultaneously, it is to be found “exclusively in Him”?! The tension between “exclusively in Him” and “… to all men” becomes even greater when, apparently, the new being does not only concern our justification but our sanctification as well. As Barth makes clear in his paragraph on sanctification (IV/2, §66), “the sanctification of man, of all men, is already fulfilled (like their justification) in the one man Jesus”. Just as we cannot and need not justify ourselves, we are “not asked to sanctify ourselves”. This is “because we are already sanctified, already saints, in this One”. This counts for believer and unbeliever: both are sanctified men and women already, that is to say, in Christ. In this way, the ‘in-Christ-only’ way of arguing leads to a form of ontologia fidei that I will refer to as typical, Barthian realism.

This ‘realism’ is closely annex with what has been designated as the “main significance” of Barth’s theology, namely his “new conception of the task of theology” shaping its own “theological ‘forms of thought’”. According to Chr. Schwöbel, Barth’s new understanding of the criteria of theology underlying his Church Dogmatics stands in sharp contrast “to what was taken for granted in the ‘forms of thought’ of modernity and its theology”. Schwöbel’s article offers a brief analysis of Barth’s development between the publication of Romans II and the start of his main work. Soon after the appearance of Romans II, Barth delivered a provoking paper entitled “The Word of God and the Task of the Minister”. Whereas Romans II offered the severe critical view that God can in no way be grasped by theology, the ‘paper’ was about the paradox of the task and impossibility – “our obligation and our inability” - of doing theology.

52 CD IV/1, 92 (98).
53 See Krötke, Sünde und Nichtiges, 90, observing “daß Christen und Nicht-Christen ontologisch zusammengehören, weil sie alle erwählt und versöhnt sind”.
54 Similar to the systematic of Reconciliation, in his doctrine of election Barth has identified Jesus Christ on the one hand as “the electing God” and on the other as the elected human being. Thus “Jesus Christ is elected man” as well, see CD II/2, 145 (157).
55 CD IV/1, 92 (98), italics ffo.
56 CD IV/1, 92 (98), italics ffo.
57 CD IV/2, 519 (587).
58 CD IV/2, 517; 516.
59 See for a clear example, CD IV/2, 103 (114f), when Barth, with Col. 3,1f in mind, states: “Our life is … not to be sought on earth, but above, in Him. But with Him it is realiter hidden and lifted up in God”.
Barth came to the bewildering conclusion “that only God himself can speak of God”.62 The implication of this is, as Schwöbel observes, that theology has its task and authority in “pointing beyond itself to something that it can neither create nor control, that can only happen contingently”63. Thus, when theology fulfils its task as it should, it must end itself in silence in which God himself should speak64. In this way, basically, the question about the (im)possibility of theology, that is, our (in)ability to speak of God, is already answered65. Barth worked this out in answer to the criticism by Von Harnack who identified the academic character of theology as a “historical discipline”. In reaction, Barth emphasized the “theological character” of theology. With this he meant that, when only God can speak of God, theology differs from other sciences in its subject-matter. Theology’s “subject-matter cannot be conceived as object, but as subject”.66 Through this discussion, as Schwöbel observes, Barth’s understanding of theology developed “to the way in which God, as the ‘subject matter’ of theology, and in this sense its ‘object’, provides the basis for a theological ‘objectivity’ that distinguishes it sharply from the emphasis on human subjectivity in modernity”.67 Now, this theological “objectivity” is precisely what I mean with Barthian realism. The main aspect of this realism, namely the perspective of the remaining divine subjectivity along the entire track of engaging yourself in theology, was clearly expressed in Barth’s first and only volume of Christian Dogmatics in Outline: the Doctrine of the Word of God (1927) as analysed by Van der Kooi.68 In his more recent study on “knowing God” with Calvin and Barth, Van der Kooi has reduced Barth’s “objectivism, and the anti-subjectivism that accompanies it” to the neo-Kantian influence of Hermann Cohen: “In Barth’s dogmatic method too, theological objectivity is only reached in a consistent retrogression toward the divine Word, judgement and election. The judgement of what is theologically real, possible and impossible is dependent on and determined by this

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62 Barth, Word of God, 214.
64 Ibid.
65 Clarity concerning the other question of his paper of 1922, namely the necessity of theology, our obligation to talk about God, was received by Barth through his study of Anselm. Once God comes to us through his Word and gives us faith, it is simply inevitable that we will try and strive to understand our faith. Barth affirms with Anselm that in faith there is an inner drive to know and to growingly understand what we believe in, see Schwöbel, 28: “If faith is the love of God, then this love necessarily includes knowledge”. This is tantamount to Anselm’s notion of fides quae rerens intellectum which Barth laid down in his book with the same title: Fides quae rerens intellectum. Anselms Beweis der Existenz Gottes im Zusammenhang seines theologischen Programms (1931). For Barth this inner necessity and obligation belongs to the community of faith which is the Church. Therefore, he felt he had to break from his program of Christian Dogmatics and at least change its name in Church Dogmatics (from 1932) in order to more adequately reflect his understanding of theology.
66 Schwöbel, o.c., 23, referring to Von Harnack’s “Fifteen Questions to the Despisers of Scientific Theology”, and Barth’s reaction in “Fifteen Answers to Professor Adolf von Harnack”.
67 Schwöbel, o.c., 24f.
68 See the dissertation of Van der Kooi, Denkweg van de jonge Karl Barth, on the development of the young Barth’s mode of theological thinking until his Christian Dogmatics. On the point that God remains the initiating Subject in his dealing with the human being, Van der Kooi, 203, observes that for Barth, the Word of God is the primary subject not only in the moment of revelation but also afterwards; God never becomes the object of our theology, but always remains the Subject, see his section 4.3.4. De onophelbaarheid der subjectiviteit: Het is niet voldoende te erkennen dat het Woord in het openbaringsgebeuren het primaat heeft. God’s subjectiviteit is blijvend. Gods openbaring betekent nooit dat hij nu object in de gebruikelijke zin des woords is; ... echte godskennis (gen.obj.) is Gods kennis (gen.subj.); see also 207: “... de geloofskennis richt zich op een object dat subject blijft en dat slechts object is vooroor de subject object wordt”
divine act, speaking and election”. Below, we will see that divine subjectivity, according to Barth, also dominates the field of a human’s sanctification.

Theological realism is a central but also ambiguous feature in all Barthian theology, reaching from his perspective on election and creation especially to his doctrine of reconciliation and its corresponding anthropology. Even in the context of sanctification, the most basic truth about us - as humans - is the being or sanctity we have - not in ourselves but - in Christ. And this genuine and true being of ours is our being sanctified already. Thus, Barth can speak in a highly realistic manner of our holiness which, however, is always qualified by the never-failing addition “in Christ”. This results in a shimmering uncertainty, firstly, regarding the question of whom Barth actually has in mind when talking about the human being “in Christ”. Is he really thinking of Tom, Dick and Harry? Or Sue, Jill and Mary? Or is he in effect only speaking of the God-man Jesus? And, secondly, it must be asked to what extent this realism – while deriving its empowering impetus from the “in Jesus” perspective – is simultaneously weakened by its implicit restriction? In fact, the status and conditions of this Barthian realism are highly relevant when we come to speak of the human role and potential and our own subjective contribution with respect to matters of sanctification and transformation. To see how this works out we need to study Barth’s understanding of Sanctification more closely in order to make clear what, exactly, is his perspective on the role of actual human life. This will be carried out below, with respect to Barth’s paragraph on sanctification (CD §66), under the element Human Potential (7.3).

7.1.c. BEING IN CHRIST AND IN OUR SELVES

The ambiguity of the ‘in Christ’ realism, concerning the question to what extent the being in Christ is really ours, is a ‘fall out’ from Barth’s description of being on two levels. Although our being is one and undivided, we nevertheless exist in “two great contexts”, as humans we live under “two qualitative determinations”. On the one hand, it is emphasized by Barth that the being we encounter in Christ is meant as our real and normal being as humans. However, he also holds that the being we actually have in ourselves does contradict our being in Christ. Thus we have our real being, so to speak, from above while, in regular day by day existence, we have our actual being from below.

With respect to the first determination it seems quite obvious that our being in Christ can only be a relevant innovation to us when this ‘being’ is both genuinely human and to some extent transcending ordinary humanity. Barth is emphatically affirming both sides. On the one hand, he emphasizes that in the existence of Jesus Christ, we are confronted by “a man like ourselves, with whom we are quite comparable”. Our “human essence” has been revealed by him, not in an incomparable or superior

\[^{69}\text{Van der Kooi, As in a Mirror, 291 (264 in the Dutch original); for Cohen philosophy was “not focused on material reality, but on the sciences that study this reality” (290 (263)). Likewise, for Barth the primary object was not material, historical, or anthropological reality as such. Instead, for him the primary “objective element [was] represented theologically in the concept of the Word, and in his later theology … by the history of Jesus Christ” (291 (264)).}\]

\[^{70}\text{CD IV/1, 501 (558), 494 (551).}\]

\[^{71}\text{CD IV/1, 97: Barth observes with respect to the believer that “his own being contradicts his being in Jesus Christ” (104: “Sein eigenes Sein widerspricht seinem Sein in Jesus Christus”).}\]
existence, not in the form of an angel or an alien, but in a being of like passions with ourselves. On the other hand, the transcendent aspect is even more stressed by Barth. Compared to our ordinary being and daily cravings, our own “essence” has been realized in Christ “in a form in which it completely surpasses and transcends the form which we give it”. In Jesus we are confronted by a human being, says Barth “in the clear exaltation of our nature to its truth, in the fulfilment of its determination”. Now, one may have some hesitation as to what extent someone who “completely surpasses and transcends” our ordinary human existence can at the same time be “quite comparable” to us. Still, this is precisely what Barth has in mind. We must not close our eyes to the fact that in the existence of Jesus we have to do with the true and normal form of human nature, and therefore with authentically human life. He lives according to the Spirit even as He is flesh. This means concretely that He lives wholly to God and His fellowmen. He lives, therefore, in one long exaltation, purification, sanctification and dedication of the flesh, i.e., of the human nature which we know only as flesh, only in its abnormal form, only in its decomposition. His life is its normalization. … It is thus His own life which He both lives and can and does also offer as a free gift for us men… In a man like ourselves there confronts us the truth of our nature, the sanctity and dignity and right of man, the glory of human life. Here the two “great contexts” or “qualitative determinations” are described as two forms of human nature: its “normal” form which is once and for all realized in Jesus Christ and its abnormal form as it appears in everyday human life. Although the normal form is to be found only in Him in the sense that Jesus “is exalted above all other men”, it is offered to us as a free gift in the way that he is “God’s valid and effective direction (Weisung) for us”. The words “valid and effective” give a hint of Barthian realism again, to the extent that Jesus Christ, as the execution or realization of the eternal divine election, is accredited to have real meaning and inevitable consequence for all human being. The ontological significance of the Christ event is expressed by Barth in double negations. The life of Jesus reveals that “man is no longer bound absolutely to his lowness”. The “absolute impossibility of his being in the height of a vital fellowship with God and in the service of God” has been broken. He is no longer “unfree to let himself be exalted and to exalt himself”. So, the basic ‘break-through’ as realized in Christ has an inevitable, real impact on all of humankind.

At this point Barth is expressing himself strongly and positively. By the very existence of the one genuine human being Jesus, all other humans, whether they consciously accept it or not, “are already alarmed” and thrown out of their “peace in the lowness of human existence”. All exist under the sign and call of Sursum corda! Sursum homines! which “applies and comes, radically and objectively to all men” (italics ffo). This means, says Barth, that “no one can alter the fact that he, too is a

72 CD IV/2, 386 (432).
73 Ibid.
74 See IV/2, 452 (509), where Barth seems to make precisely the opposite statement when arguing that Jesus “makes it (sc. his own life) a life for God and us, and therefore an incomparable life as His life in His time”. Italics mine.
75 CD IV/2, 452 (509).
76 Ibid.
77 CD IV/2, 382 (428).
brother of this One, and that this One lives for him”78. The effect of this ‘objective reality’ embodied in Christ, together with what it initiates in human lives, will be studied further in the section on human potential (7.3).

But all Barthian realism based on the analogy and ontology of faith cannot obscure that there still is a second “determination” of human existence which is our daily form of being. This ordinary context of being “corresponds fairly exactly to what the New Testament calls our being in the flesh” and which is in fact our misery (Elend), the result of our sin as sloth (Trägheit). As we are simul justus et peccator, so we are simul sanctus et peccator. As human beings we are sanctified in Jesus Christ. But simultaneously and all of the time, we are also “engaged in that slipping and sinking and falling on the one-way street from above to below”.79 Now this ‘ab-normal’ but all too ordinary side of our being human is the being we have in ourselves. This will be further investigated under the second main element of attention Hamartiology, especially ‘The material question regarding sin as sloth’ (7.2.2). But first I will discuss the cosmological findings we have found, so far, in relationship to Barth’s understanding of the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo and the two esoteric characteristics.

7.1.d. ‘CREATION FROM NOTHING’ AND THE TWO ESOTERIC CHARACTERISTICS

Considering the Barthian perspective on divine election as the decisive and originating impetus towards creation, one is unintentionally reminded of Jane Roberts and the Sethian idea of a strong, original and all-encompassing consciousness (All That Is) that is imagining and thereby creating reality. With some strength of association this can be applied to God’s eternal imagination and election of the human being in Jesus Christ. A likely model, then, for the relationship between God and Christ is not creation, but rather spiritual, imaginative emanation which is in line with some formulas of the ecumenical confessions.80 Apart from the election of Christ, however, for the genesis of all creation, including humans, Barth held on to the bulwark of Christian orthodoxy that is expressed in the theological formula creatio ex nihilo. It is useful to consider his discussion and appreciation of the doctrine,81 especially with respect to the two anti-apologetic benchmarks that have been construed upon it by Thomasius (2.1.2.d.).

As Barth points out, the idea of ‘creation from nothing’ is present in the Scriptures and was put into doctrinal use by the Early Church.82 It was the Christian opposition against “the doctrine of the world as a part or emanation of the divine being … and the doctrine of the world as an independent entity eternally co-existing with God”. Thus, it formed the needed “sharp formulation”83 over against the two main and mutually opposing theories of Platonicizing monism and Manichaean dualism. Largely, this

78 CD IV/2, 382v (428); cf. CD III/2, --- (159): On this basis, says Barth, theological anthropology must not be too shy (Die theologische Anthropologie darf nur nicht zu schüchtern sein).
79 CD IV/2, 489 (553).
80 According to the Apostle’s Creed, Jesus Christ “was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit”; with The Nicene Creed we confess him to be “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made”.
81 See his exposition in: CD III/2, 152ff (182ff).
82 Barth refers to biblical topoi such as 2 Macc. 7,28; Heb. 11,3; and Romans 4,17, see CD III/2, 152f (182f).
83 CD III/2, 154 (185).
implies the denial of both esoteric characteristics, namely of inner gnosis, that is, the immanent potential in created reality (in humans) of knowing the divine; and it also refutes the assumption of co-eternity of two opposing principles or distinct origins lying at the basis of created reality, one divine, the other non-divine. Barth, however, does not stop at what the doctrine denies but goes on to explain what it affirms. The “absolutely essential thing” expressed in the *ex nihilo* formula, says Barth, is that any creature “derives from God and no other source, and that it exists through God and not otherwise”. Creation is “that which is called into being by Him, with no other or prior rootage, but grounded only in His call”. 

Clearly, the absolute restriction implicit in the formula as such is given by Barth a less absolute, even positive meaning: basically, creation does not happen *ex nihilo* but *de deo*. Creation is not ‘from nothing’ but has a definite origin, namely, to the extent that all creatures have their origin in the divine call. Their grounding is given in the divine summoning and in nothing else. Although this counts for all creatures, it is especially valid, according to Barth, in the “anthropological context”. The human being – the “real man” – is created and exists particularly “as one called by God … in fellowship with the man Jesus” (155). It is especially in this anthropological context that the formula *creatio ex nihilo* gives a “fine and clear if negative” witness of the human creature. He is created “as he is summoned (Aufgerufen) into life by God”. As created, “he is not God but distinct from God and therefore no part of or emanation from the divine being”. Knowledge of God in humans does not come from the inside but stems from an external calling, from the one Jesus Christ coming from God. This implies further that a human being “exists through God and not apart from Him or independently of Him. The root common to monism and dualism is here cut off”, says Barth.

Now, what is rejected as the common root of both cosmologies is, apparently, that as humans and in ourselves, we have no divine being, nor autonomous being from elsewhere in us. Rather we depend entirely on God with respect to our being and potential. We are created into humans through His calling but we are no gods, nor are we parts of God. Co-eternity with God or any image of divine-human identity or even analogy of being is clearly rejected. The same counts for any alleged, co-creative predisposition in ourselves, such as inner or direct gnosis. Regarding the “possibility of man before God”, Barth observes that this “cannot be ascribed to him as a possibility from within but outside himself”, namely “in the One who summons”. And this, again, “confirms the *creatio ex nihilo*”. As our being human has its sole

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84 The quote goes further: “Hence it is not itself God or an emanation of God. Nor is it self-engendered and therefore independent of God”, *CD* III/2, 155 (185).
85 *CD* III/2, 155 (185).
86 Concentrating on the being of humans, Barth observes: “As there stands behind it God and His Word, it is not *ex nihilo* but very much *ex aliquo*”, *CD* III/2, 155 (186).
87 It is significant that the discussion of the doctrine is localized by Barth in a paragraph and section entitled “Real Man”. This is because the relevance of *creatio ex nihilo*, according to Barth, primarily concerns the anthropological question, rather than the more general cosmological question. In “its proper anthropological context” the notion of ‘creation from nothing’ is not only “fully justified” (*CC* III/2, 156 (186)); it even bears an “inner necessity of thinking and teaching” (155 (185)) .
88 *CD* III/2, 155 (185); the words “if negative” suggest at least some reservation on the part of Barth regarding the adequacy of the *ex nihilo* formula.
89 *CD* III/2, 155 (185).
90 *CD* III/2, 156 (186).
basis in our being called by God, it is “not preceded by anything apart from God and His Word”. Neither is it predisposed “by any potentiality” or “by any pre-existent material”. The equipment or endowment of our being rests entirely on the being we receive from God, that is, on our being called, and not vice versa. Thus, it is from beyond ourselves that our true, genuine being stems. It must be given to us, and we have no direct access to it from the being we have within ourselves, previously or apart from God. It is to this latter quality of being that I will now turn, namely to our sinful quality of sloth.

7.2 Hamartiology

We have a being in Christ and a being in ourselves and these two beings contradict one another. The former is the inspired “humanitas Christi, the existence of the man Jesus”. He is not only the embodiment of our true being and destination, but he also reveals our actual predicament. His being sheds light on ours, that is, on who we are in ourselves. In the encounter with our true self in him, we are inescapably exposed and made known to ourselves as “the man of sin”. This puts us, says Barth, in a position of shame.

That we have “every reason to be genuinely ashamed” of ourselves evolves from the existence of the true human being that “the omnipotent mercy of God has introduced … among us”. After picturing the moments of shame in the life of St. Peter, Barth supplies us with three reasons or arguments to show that we should be ashamed no less than the Lord’s prime disciple. Since we too act as opponents to the one, real human being that is given to us which “actually and inescapably applies to ourselves”. Yet, Barth admits that our feeling of shame would be eased, or even misplaced, if sin could be integrated in a holistic kind of “higher or deeper synthetic view”:

Is it not perhaps … an unavoidable destiny to be a man of sin, … conditioned … by his different nature and essence as a creature, by the limit which is set for him as such; by the fact that he does not confront that which is not (Nichtige) with the same sovereignty as God … might it not belong to the perfection of God, to His inaccessible and incomparable majesty encompassing both man as His good creature and the nothingness (das Nichtige) which menaces him, to have in the man who sins against Him and is therefore shamed by Him a kind of shadow, and therefore a counterpart with its negative attestation? Might it not be

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91 CD III/2, 152 (182); see Barth’s provisional definition: “the being of man is a being summoned”
92 CD IV/1, 97: Barth observes with respect to the believer that “his own being contradicts his being in Jesus Christ” (104: “Sein eigenes Sein widerspricht seinem Sein in Jesus Christus”).
93 CD IV/2, 381 (427); it implies that we “are all established in Him and directed to an eternal life in the service of God” (CD IV/2, 381f. (427).
94 See the title of §65.1. The man of sin in the light of the Lordship of the son of man, CD IV/2, 378 (423: Der Mensch der Sünde im Licht der Herrschaft des Menschensohnes).
95 CD IV/1, 395 (443).
96 CD IV/2, 387f (434f.); Barth winds up his Scriptures-based picture of Peter’s moments of shame by stating that neither in the church nor in the world there “is … anyone who is not shamed by Him as Peter is, when measured by Jesus”.
97 CD IV/2, 397 (445); Barth’s discussion contains successively: 1. that we do oppose the one exalted human being (389-391 (436-438)); 2. that this implies our disqualification (391-393 (438-441)); 3. that this really concerns us personally (393-397 (441- 445). Thus, he maintains and affirms that the “phenomenon of the shamed and sinking Peter really [has] … a basic and general significance” (389 (436)).
that man in his abasement, his sin … and his shame as such, are all integrated in the all-embracing nexus or system of a harmony of being … Might it not be that in the existence of the man Jesus, and the majesty and lowliness of the surrounding humanity which He receives and adopts, we have a supreme attestation and confirmation of this harmony, which spans even the discord of human sin and is therefore all the more glorious in its universality, so that a basic calm is legitimate?98

In these rhetorical questions, Barth is playing with monism as constituted by a form of pan-en-theism: might this not be ‘everything-in-God’? Might not all being be intended and adopted by God into one harmonious whole? All things, including the phenomena of sin and threatening evil, would then play a positive role. All creatures, including all their actions, would attest to the great, divine and all-encompassing harmony. The implication would be, firstly, that God is the intentional author of sin; secondly, that sin is not so ‘bad’ after all – ‘bad’ taken both in a quantitative and in a qualitative sense. Instead of being “genuinely disruptive” or causing “any real damage to God”, sin would basically be compatible with God. For us as humans, sin would not be a thing to be ashamed of but rather something calmly to accept.99 However, condoning sin this way is certainly not what Barth is aiming at. Instead, he is definite about us being inescapably ashamed when faced with our true self in Jesus Christ. Therefore, I will use his statement on human shame to structure my account of Barth’s perspectives on sin and evil.

The question whether and in what measure we should be ashamed of ourselves as sinners depends on at least three factors. It depends, firstly, on the formal question of how bad our sin is: this involves the question of the evil or Nothingness that is supposed to become actual, in sin as well as in natural evil (7.2.1 The formal question: How bad are evil and sin?). Our having to be ashamed depends, secondly, on the more material question what our sin actually is or does in ordinary life. This concerns Barth’s understanding of sin occurring as sloth (7.2.2 The material question regarding sin as sloth).

The third precondition for adequately speaking of shame is the point of personal ability, the question, namely, of whether we have the potential to avoid doing what is shameful; and perhaps even positively, to enact and realize what is honourable. This latter point belongs to the third main element of our exploration (7.3 Human potential).

7.2.1 The formal question: How bad are evil and sin?

The first possible factor of shame involves the formal question of the ontological aspects of sin. This will confront us again with Barth’s idiosyncratic ontology of Nothingness (das Nichtige) as, so to speak, the dark force behind both evil and sin (7.2.a The reality and the nature of Nothingness). Next, and in a similar way, I will investigate separately the two relevant phenomena in which Nothingness enters human experience, namely sin (7.2.b The reality and the nature of sin) and natural evil (7.2.c The reality and the nature of ‘natural evil’).

7.2.1.a The reality and the nature of Nothingness

The “ontic context (Zusammenhang)” of divine election and creation in which

98 CD IV/2, 397f. (446).
99 CD IV/2, 399 (447).
Evil/Nothingness occurs (7.1.a) suggests a certain closeness of Nothingness to God, grants it at least some measure of reality, and gives it an air of being intended. The seeming closeness, however, must not obscure that Nothingness, as the object of His No, is antithetic to God. In his expositions on Nothingness and its phenomena (evil, sin, death), Barth most often has two strings of sayings. On the one hand, he tends to degrade the ontological status of Nothingness, minimizing the quantitative or substantial side of its reality. On the other hand, this is combined with emphasizing in the pejorative sense the qualitative side of Nothingness. The latter he does by strongly stressing its anti-divine nature, its character as evil. I will illustrate both tendencies; and then describe what, in Barthian perspective, remains of Nothingness in the event of Jesus Christ.

7.2.1.a.1 Small ontological standing

Minimizing the ontological standing of Nothingness never goes as far as denying its reality altogether. It is not to be denied, according to Barth, that in a certain way Nothingness “is”. The question is: in what way? The special ontological character of Nothingness implies that the verb “is” already needs clarification as, according to Barth,

only God and His creature really and properly are. But Nothingness is neither God nor His creature. Thus, it can have nothing in common with God and His creatures. But it would be foolhardy to rush to the conclusion that it is therefore nothing, i.e. that it does not exist. God takes it into account. He is concerned with it. He strives against it, resists and overcomes it.100

Nothingness has to be taken seriously as God has made it into His own problem in Jesus Christ. It can be said to be “in a third way” but, as such, says Barth, it definitely “is”.101 More specifically, the being of Nothingness is explained by him as ‘crossing the frontier’ (Überschreitung) and as such it is distinguished from what he has called the “shadow side” (Schattenseite) of creation. This last notion signifies the intended reality of distinction and limitation, of frontiers and boundaries between God and creation, between different creatures and within each creature.102 In itself the “shadow side” is an aspect of the good creation as it is positively designed by God. However, as it borders on Nothingness, it can become the entry to it. When “the creature crosses the frontier”, when the created distinctions and individual distinctiveness are contravened either by us as humans or, the other way around, when we are crossed over by way of invasion “from the other side”, Nothingness becomes real. Then “it achieves actuality in the creaturely world”.103 The identification of Nothingness as crossing a frontier that should have been respected or “invasion from the other side” that spoils created integrity makes clear that Nothingness is dependent on the prior existence of the God designed creation. It has no origin, nor any creative power of its own. It only ‘is’ to the extent that God is against it, says Barth, it ‘is’ “only within the limits thus ordained.

100 CD III/3, 349 (402).
101 CD III/3, 349 (402: „daß es in seiner eigenen, in einer dritten Weise tatsächlich gar sehr ist“).
102 See CD II/3, 349f (403), see also 7.2.d.
103 CD III/3, 350 (403: „In der Überschreitung dieser Grenze vom Geschöpf her und in einem Einbruch über diese Grenze von der anderen Seite her wird und ist allerdings das Nichtigte in der Geschöpfwelt wirklich“).
But within these limits it ‘is’\textsuperscript{104} Therefore, all conceptions of Nothingness “in which its existence in opposition to the divine non-willing is denied” are to be regarded as non-Christian. The evil proceeding from Nothingness is not to be trivialized. Its existence is not intended or wanted by God like He wanted that of His creature. Nevertheless, it does have this ‘God and creation opposing’ existence. Therefore, says Barth, we cannot declare it to be “a mere semblance”.\textsuperscript{105} By consequence, evil, sin, and death as phenomena of Nothingness are certainly no illusions.

Alternately and depending on the point of view, we can see Barth in one moment rejecting all tendency to deny or underplay the reality of Nothingness; while, in the next moment, he is stressing its insubstantiality and lack of perpetuity. In particular, in the event of Jesus Christ, Nothingness is once and for all revealed as having no enduring or remaining reality. Only God has, and creation and humans have it secondarily from Him. Their reality is granted to them on the basis of persevering fellowship with Him.\textsuperscript{106} But Evil’s reality, although not to be denied, does not last; it has no perpetuity (Bestand). Even though Nothingness was ‘created’ (geschaffen) by God, He did not intend to create it, there is no inner bond with the Creator. He did not give it substance.\textsuperscript{107} Neither did He give it “time, let alone any other essence than that of non-essence”.\textsuperscript{108} As Nothingness originates under the impact of God’s No, as the object of His opus alienum, it is “insubstantial and empty”. Under the dominion of God’s left hand, it is established only “as that which has no basis”. For all the power of its peculiar being it is “nothing but a receding frontier and fleeting shadow”.\textsuperscript{109}

7.2.1.lil Evil anti-nature

The combination of playing down the ontological quantum or substance of Nothingness while emphasizing its evil quality, its anti-divine nature, was already visible in Barth’s doctrine of election with respect to evil (das Böse).

The only autonomy and status that evil can have is that of a being and essence excluded from the divine and rejected by it - the autonomy and status of the non-being (Würde des Nicht-Seins) which necessarily confronts and opposes being in the realm of creation, but which has its basis and meaning only in this confrontation and opposition, only as the spirit of constant negation.\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{104} CD III/3, 353 (407).
\textsuperscript{105} CD III/3, 353 (407): \textit{in diesen Gegenüber zu Gottes Unwillen ... innerhalb jener Grenze ist es eben kein Schein, sondern Wirklichkeit, so gewiß Gottes Unwillen dagegen, so gewiß jenes ganze opus alienum des göttlichen Eiferns, Zürnens und Richtens nicht Schein, sondern Wirklichkeit ist”}.
\textsuperscript{106} CD III/3, 360 (416f).
\textsuperscript{107} The distinctions are very subtle which can be gauged by comparing the original German text with the, in some cases remarkable, English translation: \textit{CD III/3, 360: Nothingness, however, is not created (italics flo) by God, nor is there any covenant with it. Hence it has no perpetuity. (=KD III/3, 417: “Das Nichtige aber hat keinen Bestand, so gewiß es wohl von Gott geschaffen (italics flo) ist, so gewiß es keinen Bund Gottes mit dem Nichtigen gibt”. Some lines further Barth states that Nothingness (das Nichtige) has no substance: “Es hat keine Substanz; woher wollte es sie haben, da Gott sie ihm gerade nicht geben, da er es nicht erschaffen wollte?” (italics flo). This is translated in CD III/3, 361: “It has no substance. How can it have this when God did not will to give it substance or to create it?”}.
\textsuperscript{108} CD III/3, 360v (417: “... dem er nicht einmal Zeit, geschweige denn ein anderes Wesen als das des Unwesens gegönnt hat”).
\textsuperscript{109} CD II/2, 170v (186v); in II/2 the term Nothingness (das Nichtige) was not yet used with respect to evil.
The opposing “spirit” of Nothingness and its tendency to negate creation are in line with its identification as “invasion” or ‘crossing a frontier’. All these qualifications point to its anti-divine quality or nature. As God’s Yes implies his opus proprium as his first and positively intended work of creation, covenant and grace, the opus alienum is His No that is directed against a “being which is alien and adverse to grace and therefore without it”. This being is that of Nothingness. Against the idea of God being its author or creator, Barth states explicitly that the inimical nature of Nothingness, in all its forms (as sin, evil and death), is in no way to be considered “as a natural process or condition”. In fact it is altogether inexplicable, as its reality cannot be coordinated with the reality of God nor with creation in any form. On the one hand, this leaves unimpaired that Nothingness ‘is’ and does have its own peculiar sort of undeniable reality; on the other hand, and no matter the futility of its ontological standing, Nothingness must not and cannot be disregarded or underestimated for its evil nature. It is eo ipso in opposition and resistance to God. As a negation of grace, it is the chaos-world which God didn’t create, which He wanted to transcend and leave behind as “the eternal yesterday” and which therefore is to be called evil (böse). As such, Nothingness is really “privation”. It is the attempt “to defraud God of His honour and right”, which is His being graceful. And simultaneously “it robs the creature of its salvation and right” to live by the grace of God. Where this privation occurs, Nothingness is present. Therefore, Barth regards as non-Christian all conceptions in which its character as evil is more or less blended or conjured away. Nothingness can never be trivialized, nor modulated into a reality that can in some way be harmonized with that of God and His creature. In short, the nature of Nothingness, i.e., that which renders it “intrinsically evil”, is its “being inimical first to God and then to His creature”.

7.2.1.a.III. Nothingness and the Existence of Christ

With Barth’s realism in mind, his saying “first to God” must not be taken lightly. The whole theological concept of Nothingness and consequently its supposed being or essence depend upon the “primal antithesis or encounter .. which .. is its confrontation with God”. This concerns the concrete centre of all Christian reality and truth, i.e., the one event of the self-giving of the Son of God, his obedience even unto death on the cross. It is there and then, by offering and revealing Himself as “the primary victim and foe of Nothingness”, that the “true conflict with Nothingness takes place”. It is also there and then that God has made its annihilation entirely His own cause and that we have the exclusive “noetic and ontic basis” for all that can and has to be said. In Christ we see that, in spite of all the devastating power Nothingness may have had over God’s creation and over man, it could not cope with God who humbled himself. In him it was faced with a victim over which it could not prevail. In the death of His son the divine opus alienum was “fulfilled and accomplished” whereas its object,
being that which God does not want, was extinguished and destroyed. This death on the cross makes clear that Nothingness, in face of the fullness of grace, could only undo itself, could only fulfil its true destiny of having no perpetuity. In the message of Easter, it is further revealed that the only reality that now remains is the object of God’s \textit{opus proprium}, His original and graceful dealing with creation and with man. For since God has quit saying ‘No’, the object of it no longer ‘is’. It is “deprived of even the transient, temporary impermanent being it had”. Barth is stressing his point at length and with strong qualifications. Seemingly contrary to the undeniably fearful and inimical nature of Nothingness, that is, its real existence \textit{sui generis}, we now hear that in the knowledge and light of Jesus Christ

there is no sense in which it can be affirmed that nothingness has any objective existence, that it continues except for our still blinded eyes … that it still implies a threat and possesses destructive power. … Nothingness is past, … the ancient non-being which …is consigned to the past in Jesus Christ…. Because Jesus is Victor, nothingness is routed and extirpated, it … has been absolutely set behind, not only by God, but in unity with Him by man and therefore the creature. … [As] the relationship between Creator and creature was absolutely set free in Jesus Christ … it is no longer involved in their relationship as a third factor. This is what has happened to Nothingness once and for all in Jesus Christ. … It is no longer to be feared. It can no longer “nihilate” … no longer be validly regarded as possessing any claim or right or power in relation to the creature … It is no longer legitimate to think of it as if real deliverance and release from it were still an event of the future. … We have only one freedom, namely, to regard Nothingness as finally destroyed and to make a new beginning in remembrance of the One who has destroyed it. … Christian faith is … the message of freedom for the One who has already come and acted as the Liberator, and therefore of the freedom which precludes the anxiety, legalism and pessimism (\textit{Tragik}) so prevalent in the world.\textsuperscript{119}

I conclude that Nothingness according to Barth has no ontological standing of its own. However, it is also substantiated and empowered, so to speak, through the evil character that is attributed to it. Its evil nature is so purely antithetic and inimical towards God and all creation that it can appear as no small element in human life. Therefore, though lacking any substance of its own, it cannot be denied reality: it is certainly no mere semblance. In relation to God, the evil nullity of Nothingness is the object of His No, and as such it is confronted in Jesus Christ. In this confrontation Barth observes the fundamental destruction and annulment of Nothingness. In the existence of Christ Nothingness is routed out and made passé. This peremptory dealing with it is not restricted to the God-man himself. It took place in him and now it is valid “by extension throughout the universe and its activity” and therefore “universally effective”. Until this is commonly revealed, the remains of Nothingness are no more than a “dangerous semblance”, an “echo, a shadow of what it was but is no longer”.\textsuperscript{120} In light of this, Barth even argues that the dominion of Nothingness (\textit{Reich des Nichtigen}) has never been more than the “semblance of dominion” (\textit{Scheinreich}). It is “objectively defeated” in Jesus Christ, in whom, simultaneously the Kingdom of God is erected. His Kingdom

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{117} CD III/3, 362 (418, 419).
\item\textsuperscript{118} CD III/3, 362f. (419)
\item\textsuperscript{119} CC III/3, 363-364 (419-421).
\item\textsuperscript{120} CD III/3, 367 (424).
\end{itemize}
is now without an evil rival alongside, “the only kingdom undisputed by evil”. Not seeing this, according to Barthian realism, is due to the “blindness of our eyes”.\textsuperscript{121}

These ‘flashes’ of Barthian realism cannot but remind us of similar pathos and certainty we have met in \textit{A Course in Miracles} (§ 4). This affinity will receive further attention below (7.2.1.c; 7.2.2.a.iv). Actually, Barth comes close to ‘positive thinking’ and arguing for ‘optimism’, although he himself evades these very terms. His word is freedom, the “freedom which precludes the anxiety, legalism and pessimism (\textit{Tragik}) so prevalent in the world” and in large parts of Christianity as well.\textsuperscript{122} Barth is criticizing the Christian Church, for not proclaiming the obedience of the \textit{Christian} faith, for not living in its freedom and not summoning the world to it. Contrary to its nature, the “so-called Christianity has become a sorry affair”. The monistic, justifying interpretations of Nothingness, the harmonizing theories of sin and evil, although firmly rejected, do in any case represent one genuine Christian insight, says Barth. They “at least offer a cheerful view and describe and treat nothingness as having no perpetuity”.\textsuperscript{123}

7.2.1.b \textbf{The reality and the nature of sin}

The previous discussion of Nothingness can serve as a blueprint for the approach of its main phenomenon within the human context. The same rhetorical play (by minimizing its ontological standing and emphasizing its evil character) is employed by Barth with respect to the reality and the nature of sin. Only now is the discussion framed in Christological discourse right from the start.

7.2.1.b.i. Limitation of ontological standing in Christ

Exhibiting his typical brand of \textit{realism}, Barth maintains that in the human being Jesus, the Christian “finds that his sin, and that of the world is contained, that in all its frightfulness, it is cancelled and overcome, and that it already dispersed like a fleeting shadow”.\textsuperscript{124} Christ embodies the actuality (\textit{Wirklichkeit}) in which sin is no longer to be respected or feared “because sin has lost its power (\textit{völlig entmachtet}), because it has been made contemptible (\textit{völlig verächtlich gemacht})”. Seeing onto Christ, the reality of sin is to be considered passé. This radical curtailment of sin goes along with the empowerment of the human being which is also realized in Christ. The

\textsuperscript{121} \textit{CD III}/3, 367 (424: „War es immer nur ein Scheinreich, so ist es in Jesus Christus auch als solches objektiv beseitigt“).

\textsuperscript{122} \textit{CD III}/3, 364 (420f); according to Barthian realism, as Christians we often think too small of the new reality and freedom we \textit{have} in Christ, as if it is not already accomplished and present. We keep thinking about it “with anxious, legalistic, tragic, hesitant, doleful and basically pessimistic thoughts, and … we are neither able nor prepared to think from the standpoint of Christian Faith”. The terms “pessimistic thoughts” and “pessimism” in the English version are translations of “\textit{melancholischen Gedanken}” and “\textit{Tragik}”. Actually, Barth considers the new reality in Christ in which Nothingness is destroyed as completely transcending human optimism or pessimism. See e.g., \textit{CD IV}/1, 408 (555) concerning the assertion of the totality of human sin and guilt in face of God. According to Barth, this reality can never be altered or softened by some larger or smaller amount of optimism: “It is not decided in the antithesis between an all too human optimism and an all too human pessimism in our judgment of ourselves. It is decided in the hearing of what God has to say to us concerning ourselves in the Word of His grace”.

\textsuperscript{123} \textit{CC III}/3, 364 (421).

\textsuperscript{124} \textit{CD IV}/2, 399 (448); the radical limitation of sin and sinner took place as “the Son of God died in our place the death of the old man, the man of sin”. At the same time, the Son of God “was the new man who lives in our place again as the Holy One of God in whom we are all exalted to be saints of God …”. The Christian knows this in retrospect as “the light of the lordship of the Son of Man, His direction (\textit{Weisung}) as it is issued in the might of His resurrection and the power of the Holy Spirit, discloses who and what is already overcome in His death, and from what situation this one is already snatched”.

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Christian according to Barth, the human being in Christian perspective, “has been freed and set on his feet in face of [sin], because he has already been lifted up out of its abasement”. Thus, on the one hand, and in a like manner as happened with respect to Nothingness, the reality of sin, including its humiliating power over the sinner, is drastically reduced and overcome in the existence of Jesus Christ: in him it is robbed of its power and ontological substance. Still, the “radical limitation” of both sin and the doer of sin must not lead to trivialize either one or both. Barth hastens to add that their dismantlement implies no “harmony of being” whatsoever, nor any “peaceful co-existence of God, man and sin”. Between the sinful ones that we are in ourselves and the new and holy ones that we have become in Jesus Christ, there is no continuity.125

7.2.1.b.ii. Enlarging Its Evil or Anti-nature

Like its ontological insignificance, the dangerous and evil nature of sin has also been exposed once and for all in the existence of the God-man. In Jesus Christ the old man of sin died so as to be completely replaced by the new man. This took place in an “irreconcilable and unbridgeable opposition”. No compromise was made but an “unequivocal and intolerable and definitive enemy of God was treated as he deserved and utterly destroyed”. This enemy is nothing else than “the sin of man; it is he himself as the man who wills this sin”. This means that for the Christian, there cannot be any “systematic co-ordination of God and sin” nor any “synthesis of God and evil (Übel)” whatsoever.126

This is stressed even more when it is further observed that in the person of the Son of Man it was “none other than God himself” who acted against sin.127 By this the seriousness of its disturbing character can be pondered: sin is more than only relatively or partly inimical to the divine life and being. In the eyes of God, sin is “something quite intolerable … an infinite and absolute evil (Übel)”. Despite its ontological triviality, it is something that humanity could never cope with on its own accord. Instead “God Himself had to come down, to give Himself, to sacrifice Himself, in order that a place should be found for a man freed from this evil, and a reconciled world introduced in this man”. All this may convince us “how great is the absurdity of sin and how serious it is” because

God Himself is affected and disturbed and harmed by it. His own cause, His purpose for man and the world, is disrupted and arrested; His own glory is called in question. He Himself finds Himself assaulted by it in His being as God, and He hazards no less than His being as God to encounter it. …The seriousness of this disturbance can be measured only by the fact that it is met and overcome by God Himself.128

Definitely, these are no trivial qualifications by means of which Barth repudiates any perspective of a kind of arrangement or coordination between God and sin. Any form of an all-encompassing monistic harmony in which sin could have its rightful

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125 CD IV/2, 399 (448): “There is no continuity or harmony or peace between the death of the old man and the life of this new”.
126 CC IV/2, 400 (449).
127 CD IV/2, 400v (450): The One who … acted against sin, i.e., who suffered in our place the death of the old man, the man of sin, is none other than God Himself in the person of the Son of Man.
128 CD IV/2, 401 (450).
place, is entirely out of the question. Human sin is pictured as so evilly opposed to God and His creature that He had to put Himself, His own being at stake to counteract it and to rescue humanity. At this stage, one can only wonder how Barth could ever be accused of supporting monism, as in these lines he seems rather to enhance a severe form of dualism between God and sin/evil. No matter their trivial, feather-weight ontology, Nothingness and its phenomenon human sin are highly disturbing. Far from fitting in smoothly within a peaceful cosmology, sin as phenomenon of Nothingness is certainly something that we should take very seriously. Only in Christ is its insubstantial but dangerous enmity disarmed, its fearfulness eliminated. It is only from there that it need not frighten us anymore. But in face of Jesus Christ, it does make us ashamed before God. In this respect, Barth’s qualification of the actual and existential side of sin, namely as sloth becomes relevant. But before turning to the more material side of sin in real life, I will describe the other throw-up of Nothingness next to human sin, namely, the complex of phenomena that is traditionally designated as natural evil (7.2.4). The reality and the nature of ‘natural evil’). In this way, we stay in line with the structure in the previous paragraphs on the element of Hamartiology.

7.2.1.c The reality and the nature of ‘natural evil’

So far, Nothingness/evil according to Barth has been envisioned solely in religious terms, that is, in its relationship to God and his creation. Nothingness is the dark power that comes to expression in human sin, as well as in other forms of evil that threaten creation. These phenomena, such as natural disasters or limitations to existence, are traditionally designated as ‘natural evil’. The question to be asked in advance, however, is whether such phenomena are to be interpreted as evil or as natural? The answer Barth gives is that they can be both. ‘Evils’ like sickness and death can be considered either as natural or as evil. To the extent that they are natural, they are not evil. And to the extent that they are evil, that is, as phenomena of Nothingness, they are not to be considered natural. In order to clarify this, I will investigate Barth’s understanding of the example of illness, which is all the more interesting as he has inserted an exposition on the teaching of Mary Baker Eddy. Her Christian Science is highly congenial to A Course in Miracles. Both these systems exhibit strong monism, in which only God, only divine reality seen as mind, spirit, or love, is considered as genuinely real. All other so-called realities – either mental or physical ones - are declared to be illusory, only thoughts based on separation and fear. Thus, according to Mrs. Eddy as well as

129 Cf. CD IV/2, 400 (450) “If he knows the radical decision that has been made in Jesus Christ for the world and himself and against evil, how can he still try to create a synthesis of God and evil, the world and evil and himself and evil”.

130 CD IV/2, 401 (450: „Er selbst findet sich in seinem Sein als Gott durch sie angefochten und setzt nicht weniger als sein Sein als Gott aufs Spiel, um ihr zu begegnen“). In other places, however, Barth can also stress that God is entirely unassailable from the side of Nothingness, see CD III/3: “He whom Nothingness has no power to offend” (356 (411))”. God’s utter supremacy over evil is attested when Barth is stating that “nothingness is obviously unable to contest” God’s honour and right (357 (412)); that, although evil/Nothingness may have power over God’s creatures, “against Him, nothingness has no power of its own” (358 (413)); regarding the opposition of evil/Nothingness against God and his creatures that God is “the God who can so easily master it” (359 (414)).

131 CD III/4, 364f (414-416).

132 See CD III/4,365 (415), in opposition to the monism of Mrs. Eddy: “God is indeed the basis of all reality. But He is not the only reality. As Creator and Redeemer, He loves a reality which is different from Himself ..., which has in face of Him an independent and distinctive nature and is the subject of its own history”.

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in *ACiM*, for the truly spiritual and loving mind, outer phenomena like sickness and death are just semblance, mere appearances. They are nothing real but *illusions*.

Barth has little appreciation for this way of disrobing the everyday experience of its realness. Yet, with respect to the reality of Nothingness we have seen him arguing in a like manner, minimizing the ontological standing of Nothingness and leaving it the reality of a “semblance” with no more substance than that of a fleeting shadow. Sin is treated similarly. This makes one curious of the kind of reality Barth has in stock for ‘natural’ phenomena of Nothingness, like sickness and death. If, in relationship to the divine Creator, Nothingness as the evil power behind them is a semblance, then what does he hold of its concretions?

### 7.2.1.c.1. Sickness and Death as Natural

The problem of sickness and death is envisioned in a subparagraph *Respect for Life*, included in the ethics of his doctrine of Creation (*CD* III/4, §55,1). It is approached from two sides, firstly, as natural phenomena (i), secondly from the perspective of Nothingness (ii).

In the first sense both phenomena, sickness and death, are to be seen as normal aspects of the created and intended limitation of human life (*befristetes Leben*). As such they are natural elements, belonging to the so called shadow-side of creation, which is not evil. In fact, human life in its aspects of majesty and littleness, weakness and strength, obstruction and development, is limited by God not to its destruction, but to its benefit and salvation. Therefore, Barth can state that in a certain way God can even be “gracious to man ... in the fact that He permits him to fall sick, to be sick and perhaps even to die of sickness”. Seen from this perspective the human response has to be that of endurance and patience – or with Matthew Fox perhaps even that of “befriending the darkness” (5.2.a) - as he is drawn by God into His plan, into “what in its entirety, because it comes from Him, cannot be evil but only good, and cannot finally be pain but only joy”. But all this, in contrast with evil, belongs to the God-designed creation. Our main concern, however, is with sickness (and death) seen from the first perspective, namely, as concretions of Nothingness.

### 7.2.1.c.2. Sickness and Death as Evil

As a concretion of Nothingness (*das Nichtige*) sickness is “an encroachment on the life which God has created”. In direct opposition to Mary Baker Eddy’s illusions, Barth opens his own exposition by stating that “sickness is real”, adding immediately however that “it is not real in the same way as God is”. But real it is, first of all in the experience of the sick person himself. The weakness that opposes his health and his strength to be is “not ... an appearance (*kein Schein*) but is effective and real”. In his will for health the sick person “meets a hard ‘object’ in this primary and essential sense”. All the fighting and doctoring we bring into practice to regain health and the experience of being overcome by illness in spite of it: these “are not all plays of the imagination, but real events in the real history of the real man”. Sickness is definitely no “fake or imaginary opponent”, but “an enemy which is in some sense real”. Now what is meant here with real “in some sense”? Apparently, the plain reality as directly

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133 *CD* III/4, 371-374 (422-426).
134 *CD* III/4, 374 (426).
135 *CD* III/4, 366 (416).
and subjectively experienced by the patient is not the reality that is properly to be attributed to sickness, when seen from the perspective of Nothingness. In this respect it must be remembered, says Barth, that

sickness is a forerunner and messenger of death, and indeed of death as the judgment of God and the merited subjection of man to the power of Nothingness in virtue of his sin. From this standpoint, sickness like death itself is unnatural and disorderly. It is an element in the rebellion of chaos against God’s creation. (…) Like sin and death, it is neither good nor is it willed and created by God at all, but is real, effective, powerful and menacing only as part of that which He has negated, of His kingdom on the left hand, and therefore with its nullity (Nichtigkeit). But in accordance with the will of God and under His reign it is necessarily dangerous – the forerunner and messenger of death, the executor of God’s final sentence - to the man who has fallen from God and become His enemy. … Sickness … is an element and sign of the power of the chaos threatening creation on the one hand, and on the other an element and sign of God’s righteous wrath and judgment, in short, an element and sign of the objective corruption which is related and corresponds to human sin.136

Sickness is to be regarded as an “invasion of the realm of death to which [man] himself has deliberately opened the defences”.137 This invasion happens in accordance with God’s judgment and under His permission. In fact, sickness and death, though neither good, nor willed or created by God, nevertheless are used by Him as executors of His interim and final sentence. The dominating view in the scriptures, says Barth, is such that sickness and a forteriori the following death point towards the “merited subjection of man to the power of Nothingness in virtue of his sin”.138 As humans, we ourselves are the originator and cause of our whole predicament, in which we are completely overtaken by the divine judgment. It seems out of the question to believe that we can alter it again by our own measures alone, hence the rhetorical question: “are not faith and prayer the only real possibilities in face of this reality of sickness?”139 But this reflex is dismissed by Barth as defeatist thinking and as not at all Christian, because it overlooks “the command of God” that man must will to live and to be healthy and must “exercise and not neglect his strength to be as man”.140 Resignation overlooks further that God has already overcome and bound the forces of Nothingness and consequently those of sickness. This took place “in Jesus Christ and His sacrifice, by which the destroyer was himself brought to destruction”. Therefore, one’s own determination and counteraction against phenomena of Nothingness is

136 CD III/4, 366f. (416f).
137 CD III/4, 367 (417).
138 CD III/4, 366 (416f); It may be questioned to what extent this really is the dominating view of the scriptures. Barth assumes sickness and sin to be closely connected to one another (366f (417)) and he assumes a similar connection between forgiveness/repentance and healing (370 (421); 371 (422)). Examples mentioned are: the Psalms, Job, the Synoptic Gospels (367 (417)), Hezekiah in 2 K.20,1f. (369 (420) and others. In the cases of both Job and Hezekiah, however, it is clearly not their sin that is the relevant factor with regard to their misery. In the case of Job this has been explicitly acknowledged by no one less than God himself (Job 1,8). Hezekiah, after hearing he has to die, goes into prayer saying: “Don’t forget that I have been faithful to you, LORD. I have obeyed you with all my heart, and I do whatever you say is right”. If we notice the outcome, the LORD agreed with him.
139 CD III/4, 367 (417f).
140 CD III/4, 367 (418); and as man is not to bring himself into greater condemnation, “unquestioning obedience is his only option”.
“better than a whole ocean of pretended Christian humility”. 141 Although the limits on our part are modest, we must will what God has already willed and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. We must take sides with Him against “that whole kingdom on the left hand”, saying No to it – as He has done already – and acting accordingly.

Summarizing Barth’s understanding of so-called ‘natural evils’ like sickness and death, we can say that, firstly, they are seen as elements of the good creation, be it of its shadow-side which, however, is not evil. Secondly, such phenomena can appear as concretions of Nothingness in which case they are no longer just natural. Thirdly, as intrusions of evil they are unleashed by human sin; and as such, they, fourthly, are permitted or used by God to execute His righteous wrath and judgment. Even then, fifthly, they have no perpetuity as God has already overcome and bound the forces of Nothingness, and consequently those of sickness and death, in Jesus Christ. 142 Given these aspects, we must follow in the case of illness the divine command to resist it and strive for health and life. Faith and prayer can never be the final lines in an elegy of resignation. Instead, they are the empowering and necessary preconditions to determine the will that is required from a person in order to act himself: “modestly … but energetically”. 143 If he does so, says Barth with the audacity that is typical for his realism, he cannot lack the promise, he will soon see its fulfilment: “Those who take up this struggle obediently are already healthy in the fact that they do so, and theirs is no empty desire when they will to maintain or regain their health”. 144

The result of Barth’s theological navigation leaves us with a rather complicated ‘reality’ of the phenomena under discussion. Firstly, it is perfectly conceivable that a certain illness or even death is a quite natural phenomenon as experienced by one individual, while being a self-deserved attack of Nothingness in the case of another. Only in the latter case it is evil. Secondly, such phenomena – some only natural, some also evil – are no illusions, says Barth. They are experienced as real, hard “objects”. The real threat and danger of the evil phenomena spring from Nothingness which is the “Kingdom on the left hand”, to which God has said No. This No, however, also implies His verdict against human sin. Thus, a natural ‘shadow’ element can be used by God as an instrument for judging human sin. 145 In this case, what starts as an innocent illness appears to be an evil intrusion from Nothingness in Gods hand. The implication is a somewhat dubious divine strategy of using one type of evil (or shadow-element) to correct another. Then thirdly, says Barth, it is the central message of the Gospel that God has taken his No and verdict upon Himself with the liberating effect that He “has already conquered for us in the whole glory of His mercy and omnipotence”. 146 Moreover, as eternally in His election, so in the midst of time in Jesus Christ, God has finally and eternally said Yes to man. That is to say that for those

141 CD III/4, 368 (418, 419).
142 CD III/4, 368 (418): In face of Nothingness and in face of sickness, human patients must offer resistance, because “God himself is not only Judge but faithful, gracious and patient in His righteous judgment …. [because] He Himself has already marched against that realm on the left, and …. has overcome and bound its forces and therefore those of sickness in Jesus Christ and His sacrifice, by which the destroyer was himself brought to destruction”.
143 CD III/4, 368 (419).
144 CD III/4, 369 (420).
145 See above, the cadre quotation: CD III/4, 366f. (416f).
146 CD III/4, 369 (420).
who really acknowledge and accept the “inexhaustible consolation of the promise”, sickness and death are really threatening and dangerous no longer. Believing and accepting the promise, they are healthy already.

The outcome, then, seems to be that what remains of the at first threatening ‘reality’ of sickness, is little more than a ‘semblance’. Although Barth does not use the word ‘semblance’ explicitly with respect to sickness, one can hardly escape the conclusion that the result of his ontological assessment both of sickness and of the underlying Nothingness comes remarkably close to Mrs. Eddy’s illusions. The difference between them is the perspective of monism and divine-human unity. On this point Barth maintains against Mrs. Eddy (essentially also against ACiM) that God “is not the only reality” although he certainly is “the basis of all reality” He loves us for sure. But what He loves is “a reality which is different from Himself” since for Barth, human beings in face of God have “an independent and distinctive nature”.  

So far, I have described the more formal, ontological side of Nothingness and its evil phenomena. In themselves or as such, they have only a trivial grade of being according to Barth, since both the root and its concretions have been exposed and dismantled in Christ.

I will now explore Barth’s perspective on the more material concretion Nothingness takes in actual human life as the sin of sloth. Under one of it forms, Barth’s perspective on sickness and death, as related to the perspective of Christian Science (Mrs. Eddy) and ACiM, will return to our attention (see 7.2.2.a.iv Human care and anxiousness).

7.2.2 The material question regarding sin as sloth

Sin within the context of sanctification concerns the way in which we frustrate our own transformation. This form of sin has been labelled by Barth as sloth, which can play a disturbing role in four different relationships (7.2.2.a Forms of sloth). As I have done above with respect to Nothingness, natural evil, and sin in general (in 7.2.1), I will address the same ontological questions of reality and nature with respect to the particular form of sin which is sloth (7.2.2.b The nature and the reality of Sloth). Finally, I will describe how, according to Barth, our sloth relates to our autonomous selves (7.2.2.c Sloth as act or as fate).

7.2.2.a. Forms of Sloth

It is in their differentiation from the royal One that all other humans are disqualified as sinners. In the rejection of their fellow human Jesus Christ, refusing in themselves to live in the distinctive freedom of his, their sin, our sin crystallizes as sloth (Trägheit). The resulting Barthian picture of our slothful self, willingly denying

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147 As we have seen above (7.2.b - Nothingness in the existence of Jesus Christ), Barth did use “semblance” with respect to Nothingness, though with opposing orientation. On the one hand, he used it to indicate that Nothingness can not be declared to be “a mere semblance” (kein Schein, sondern Wirklichkeit (CD III/3,353 (407))). On the other hand, he stated that Nothingness is “only a dangerous semblance” (gefährlichen Schein), “an echo, a shadow of what it was but is no longer” (CD III/3,367 (424)). Here Barth even held that the dominion of Nothingness, that “was only the semblance of dominion, is now objectively defeated as such in Jesus Christ” (War es immer nur ein Scheinreich, so ist es in Jesus Christus auch als solches objektiv beseitigt).

148 CD III/4, 365 (415).
149 CD IV/2, 393 (441); 406 (455v)
the new and true and potential being we have in Jesus Christ and stubbornly staying behind it, is not unlike some of the depictions of the outer ego we have encountered in the New Age sources. The difference is that with Jane Roberts/Seth the outer ego is ignoring or denying its inner self whereas, according to Barth, the better or true ‘self’ we reject or ignore, is not within us but beyond ourselves in Christ. Thus, our sloth rejects Him. In relation to Him it is our great inaction, our hesitation, our withdrawal into ourselves. Man (der Mensch) rejects Him because he wants to elect and will himself, and he does not want to be disturbed in this choice. … When he comes face to face with the will of God in Him he comes to the frontier which he can cross only if he will give up himself and … find God and himself in this Other. … He regards it as vitally necessary to be free of this man, i.e., of the God of this man. … He wants to be left alone by … this man … with His summons to freedom. He regards the renewal of human nature declared in His existence as quite unnecessary. He sees and feels, perhaps, the limitation and imperfection of his present nature … he thinks he has a sober idea of what is attainable … within the limits of his humanity. This leads him to question the real significance of this renewal, of man’s exaltation. The limited sphere with which he is content seems to him to be his necessary sphere, so that its transcendence in the freedom of the man Jesus is an imaginary work in which he himself can have no part.\footnote{150 CD IV/2, 407, 408 (457, 458).}

Thus, our sloth is the inner reluctance, obstinacy or easy-going modesty to accept as our own the freedom of the One in whom “we have a renewal and exaltation from servitude to lordship”. We consider it a dangerous and undesirable business because it would involve leaving the moderate, comfortable life we presently have as slaves and “assuming responsibility as lords”. But we prefer a life “which moves and circles around itself” to one of living with God and implementing the life of Jesus into our own. Thus, we entangle ourselves in a “terrible paradox”. By refusing Jesus and His God, a human being is denying “to be himself, breaking free from his own reality, losing himself in his attempt to assert himself, and thus becoming his own pitiful shadow”.\footnote{151 CD IV/2, 408 (458, 459).} Thus, the general picture of a slothful person is that of one who “lets himself fall”, being “too lazy to follow the movement of God”.\footnote{152 Cf. CD IV/2, 453 (511); 458 (516): “that we are too lazy to follow the movement of God, which lifts us up, that instead we let ourselves sink and fall”.} As a consequence, such a person comes to live “in contradiction” both to God and to his/her genuine self.\footnote{153 CD IV/2, 409 (459).} Now, this may suffice to draw the spiritual essence of sloth as it appears from our comparison with Jesus Christ. In what follows, I will briefly describe the different forms of sloth that Barth has distinguished.

In light of the Royal One, our sloth is elaborated in correlation with the four basic anthropological relationships that Barth had distinguished earlier.\footnote{154 Namely in the doctrine of man as the creature of God, CD III, 2 (1948); and, in the first part of theological ethics, the doctrine of the command of God the Creator, CD III, 4 (1951).} As humans we live in four basic relationships, namely with God, with our fellow humans, with the created order and with our historical limitation in time. Each of these relationships or contexts has met its true realization in the existence of Jesus Christ. When we see ourselves in Him as in a mirror, our sloth becomes actual as refusal: firstly, a refusal...
to accept the true knowledge of God as revealed in Jesus Christ resulting in ignorance and stupidity (i) in relationship to God; secondly, our sloth is our unwillingness to be a brother or sister to our fellow human beings, as was realized in the life of Jesus. This leads to our inhumanity (ii); thirdly, it is our not complying to live in accordance with our created constitution as a psycho-somatic unity of body and soul. Instead, we let ourselves fall into dissipation and indiscipline (iii); and fourthly, it is our resistance against our historical limitation in time leading to anxious human care (iv) in relationship to our finitude. I will briefly dwell on each form.

7.2.2.a. I. IGNORANCE, STUPIDITY

When God’s eternal Word became flesh, our true relationship to God came to be revealed in Jesus Christ as the divine direction (Weisung) to us. In his royal freedom, he established the true knowledge of God on our behalf “so that we ourselves should be wise in virtue of His wisdom, that we are elected and created and determined in Him”. In this light sloth establishes itself in the fact that

we on whose behalf, for whose enlightenment and information and instruction, He has this freedom, refrain from making use of this freedom which is also, and precisely, our own freedom. … We harden ourselves in our unreason, our ignorance of God, our lack of wisdom, our folly and stupidity. And this refusal to move where we can and should bestir ourselves and follow Him … makes us the stupid fools we are. This is the folly in which we want to remain as we are instead of being those we are in Him and by Him.

Harbouring the pretension that we can tell ourselves what is true and good, we entangle ourselves in a “culpable relapse into self-contradiction”. In essence, this sinful stupidity has nothing to do with more or less intellectual ability. Basically, it is “the perverted action of that great omission” of the agnoosia theou (I Cor.15,34). It is the “practical atheism” of the fool (Ps. 14,1) who may be perfectly aware of the fact of divine revelation, but refuses to accept it in practice. In addition, keeping away from explicit rejection, a slothful person will rather try to hide his real thinking. Thus, instead of denying God openly, he will accommodate God’s Word to a principle or system without any need or intention of hearing and practicing it afresh. In so doing, a human may regard himself as perfectly “enlightened by the Word of God”, while in fact he is swimming in “a whole ocean of religious and even Christian stupidity”.

7.2.2.a. II. INHUMANITY

Our true and basic relationship with our fellow-humans has been actualized and revealed in the royal humanity of Jesus. He was “wholly the Fellow-man of us His

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155 Cf. CD IV/2, 409 (459v).
156 CD IV/2, 409 (460).
157 CD IV/2, 410 (460v).
158 CD IV/2, 412 (464); Barth is rather harsh on human knowledge of self in relationship to God derived from other sources, cf. CD IV/2, 413 (464): “Every attitude in which we think we can authoritatively tell ourselves what is true and good and beautiful, what is right and necessary and salutary, is stupid”.
159 CD IV/2, 415 (466f). Cf. the ’nabal’ of Ps. 14,1, who says not openly, but in his heart, that “there is no God”.
160 CD IV/2, 413 (464).
161 CD IV/2, 415 (467).
fellows … wholly the Brother of us His brothers”. In his life he has made authoritatively clear that being human means to be bound and committed to other humans, to live in fellowship with God and therefore in fellowship with other men and women.\footnote{162 CD IV/2, 432v (486v); CD IV/2, 421 (474): “The man who is not the fellow of others is no real man at all.”}{162} We, however, on whose behalf He was and is human in this freedom fail to obey the call to this freedom. Among all the others … we remain in our isolation and seclusion and self-will and unwillingness, and therefore in our inhumanity. We are again inactive where we can and should and must let ourselves be moved in the direction of these others. This is the second form of our sloth, in which we want to be alone instead of being those we already are in and by this One.\footnote{163 CD IV/2, 433 (487).}{163}

Inhumanity too will often show up in disguise. In order to hide it, we may establish ourselves as champions of law and order; or assume a pose of liberal non-conformism to overthrow strangling institutions; or we may promote projects of philanthropy. But even love itself – be it humanitarian, brotherly, neighbourly love or even family love - may form no more than the front of our inhumanity and hidden self-love, dressed up in these sublime forms. Instead of openly acknowledging our inhumanity, we will always try to conceal it and keep up a better moral appearance.\footnote{164 Cf. CD IV/2, 439, 438 (495, 496).}{164}

7.2.2.a.iii. Dissipation, indiscipline with respect to oneself

With respect to our created constitution, and thus to ourselves as a physical-spiritual unity, Barth states that in the existence of Jesus we have to do with “the true and normal form of human nature, and therefore with authentically human life”. In his royal freedom, He is wholly Himself as “the soul of His body in its free control” and as “the body of His soul in its free service”. His life is human life in its “normal” form, which He offers us as a free gift.\footnote{165 CD IV/2, 452 (509).}{165} But in our sloth we decline its summoning to be those we originally are. … As man does not will to know God, and as he wills to be without and even against his fellow-men, so he wills himself in the disorder, discord and degeneration of his nature, declining to make use of the freedom to be a whole man which is addressed and given to him in the direction of Jesus … This means that he falls. … He brings it about himself by letting himself fall. Sin as sloth, in this particular form of dissipation (Verlotterung), is indiscipline. To live as an authentic man would mean … to be what one is as a man even at the cost of severity against oneself. But it is here that … the great refusal takes place.\footnote{166 CD IV/2, 453f (511).}{166}

Thus, we choose to live like spiritual “vagabonds”, welcoming permissions rather than commands. Soul and body are explored and allowed to go their own separate ways, which involves a disruption and disintegration of the unity in which we exist as humans. This variety of sin is perhaps the most openly acknowledged – as it surely became in the permissive society since the 1950s and 1960s – which makes its camouflage all the more effective. Instead of being sin, why should it not be “holy”
to follow your own inclination? Why not consider it genuinely “human” to pursue the desire of the flesh? Why not cherish it as freedom and naturalness? Indulging and following one’s passions, whether of body or of soul, becomes the “courageous work of the man who is free in spirit”, whereas prudishly starting back from them is, then, a sign of sloth and pusillanimity. Barth, however, considers these suggestive questions and statements as sheer hypocrisy and concealment of sin, both “taking place under the title and glory of their opposite”.167

7.2.2.a.Iv HUMAN CARE / ANXIOUSNESS

Regarding the attitude to our historical limitation in time, Barth again takes his starting-point in the royal freedom of our fellow human being Jesus, especially towards his finitude and death, as He offered his life to God and humans. As the Crucified, He is the Victor “at the very point where our frontier is reached and our time runs out”. As such, his life shines as a direction on ours in order to live our limited lives “confidentially and courageously”, offering us the freedom even “to rejoice as we arrive at our end and limit”.168 Sloth now takes the form of human care as we

start back at the very place where we should not only be calm and confident but also hope. We fret at the inevitable realization that our existence is limited. … we look frantically around for assurances on this side of the moment when they will all be stripped away, anxiously busying ourselves to snatch at life before we die. … In this, too, we fall back and are behindhand (bleiben wir im Rückstand). And this, too, is responsible transgression – sin.169

Anxious care especially in face of death, not seeing God but only Nothingness awaiting us, is the result of human sloth, it is our “culpable negligence”.170 According to Barth, it is sin and guilt because we refuse to live “with the objective truth (italics ffo) that there is no reality in the enemy which threatens us or the abyss before us, because we are in the hand … of God”.171

The “objective truth” is a clear example of Barthian realism. It means that according to Barth there is no genuine reality in (the dread of) death. And this, in turn, can fairly well serve as a paraphrase of Mrs. Eddy’s saying – or that of A Course in Miracles – that ‘death is an illusion’ (see above 7.2.1.c.ii). Even in his explicit wording, Barth comes very close to the terminology of both Christian Science and ACiM when observing that our anxious care

derives its power from its opponent, from that which causes it and against which man tries to secure himself. It has all the power of the end, of death without God and without hope. This illusionary (illusionäre) opponent, who has already been routed out, this form of nothingness (diese Gestalt des Nichtigen), is the force which inexplicably but in fact rules in human care and affects the life of man. The thought (der Gedanke) of it makes man

167 CD IV/2, 456-459 (514-518).
168 CD IV/2, 468 (527,528).
169 CD IV/2, 468 (528).
170 CD IV/2, 470 (531).
171 Italics mine; CD IV/2, 472 (534: Wüßte er darum, lebte er angesichts der objektiven Wirklichkeit: daß es mit dem drohenden Feind, dem Abgrund da vorne nichts ist, daß er sich in der Hand und Hut Gottes befindet, dann würde er sich ja der Sorge gar nicht erst hingebe …).
dissatisfied. He thinks that he is menaced by it. Believing this, he can only be anxious … and move forward to his future with the deep unrest of one who is discontented with his finitude. And it is this illusory picture (illusionäre Gebilde seiner Meinung), the phantasy (das Gespenst) of a hopeless death, which …dictates the law of his conduct. As he is anxious, he gives life to this phantasy, arming it with its illusory weapons and directing its illusory arm.\textsuperscript{172}

Presented in this way, death and the dread of having to die belong to the category of self-imagined illusions and unnecessary phantasies. Refusing to rest in courage and confidence, this final form of sloth becomes strangely active, according to Barth, when creating its own reality of anxious care and distress about imminent death. I restate that the ontological standing granted by Barth to the phenomena of Nothingness (as illusions and products of phantasy) comes close – more than he admitted -\textsuperscript{173} to the perspective he rejected in Christian Science and Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy (7.2.1.c.ii) and which is also prominent in \textit{ACiM}.

When anxious forms of care, like fear of falling ill or having to die take hold of us and we fail to find safety and put our trust in God’s hand, we will try to conceal the uneasiness, either in an “essentially activist” or “essentially passive” form. As activists, we end up in a morality of duty, with a high estimation of achievement, growth and obligations, while the passive reaction often leads to a morality of relaxation or non-attachment, with a preference for attitudes of resignation, non-resistance and contemplation. Though Barth credits the latter with higher dignity, he considers its devotees to be victims of a “great illusion” just like the activist ones. Both of them do not take their basis in (the assertion of) “the being and life of God for man”. Instead, they basically think and tacitly fear that there is only limitation and threat ahead of them which they try to face with a superior gesture.\textsuperscript{174} Both have a “false opinion of human temporality”.\textsuperscript{175} In fact, what Barth himself was positively advocating for comes down to an attitude of \textit{nonattachment-plus}. Being fully human, as shown in the God-man, we should calmly accept our natural and created limitation during this life-time. Not only this, but especially at life’s end, we should positively embrace our finitude with joy, being “joyously certain” that its fulfilment is near.\textsuperscript{176}

Thus, Barth comes close to what in the \textit{Via Negativa} of Matthew Fox is called “befriending the darkness” (§5.2.a), befriending even death. According to Barth, this is possible because if God is “near to us anywhere, it is … at the very point where we meet our end [and] are met by our Lord and Creator and Reconciler and Redeemer”.\textsuperscript{177}

\textsuperscript{172} \textit{CD} IV/2, 471 (532)

\textsuperscript{173} Cf. \textit{CD} 111/4, 364 (414f): Barth based his discussion of Mary Baker Eddy on the careful study “Scientismus” (Christian Science) by Karl Holl, in: id., \textit{Gesammelte Aufsätze}, 460-479. Holl had explicitly refrained to give an easy refutation of his subject. Instead, he drily concluded: “Der Satz, daß Gott die Wirklichkeit ist, ist der Grundsatz jeder echten, keineswegs der entarteten Religion. Dieser Satz hat aber zu seiner gedanklichen Umdrehung den andern, daß also die Welt ein Schein ist. Gerade die höchsten Vertreter der Religion haben immer diese Behauptung gestreift” (o.c., 477). Holl’s attempt at understanding the \textit{the-ontology} of Christian Science was a bit too benevolent in the eyes of Barth, witness his comment: “Karl Holl has depicted and done it almost too much justice …” (364 (414)).

\textsuperscript{174} \textit{CD} IV/2, 473, 474 (534-536). In the terminology of Matthew Fox, we could say that we should ‘befriend our death and our having to die’.

\textsuperscript{175} \textit{CD} IV/2, 477 (539).

\textsuperscript{176} \textit{CD} IV/2, 468 (528).

\textsuperscript{177} \textit{CD} IV/2, 475f (538).
Obviously, it is far from self-evident that we know God so intimately that we even appreciate our moment of death as the very point of hope and graceful fulfilment. Therefore, we always need “the work of His Word and Holy Spirit”. And besides that, of course, we should leave behind our “refusal to move where we can and … bestir ourselves“ and follow the Crucified who is the Victor. In short, we should start “being those we are in him and by Him” already. The relationship between these two workings, one divine, the other by ourselves, as well as their effects in practical human life, is the question of our sanctification and will be addressed under the heading Human Potential (7.3).

7.2.2.b. The nature and the reality of sloth

As phenomena appearing in opposition to the real humanity in Jesus Christ, the different forms of sloth reflect the same characteristics of Nothingness in general and in its forms of sin and evil outlined earlier. Barth applies the same strategic method of emphasizing the unfathomable evil quality of sloth (i) while demeaning its ontological weight (ii)

7.2.2.b.i. Nature of sloth

The true nature of our sloth as a phenomenon of Nothingness can be illustrated with the refusal to accept our true humanity in Jesus Christ. The remaining inhumanity on our part is thus revealed as

our persistence in the direction to that which is not (Zuwendung zum Nichtigen). Man wills that which according to His incarnation God does not will. He wills the impossible … For no real reason he dissociates himself from the movement to his fellows which proceeds from Jesus. (…) The form and texture may vary, but it is always his sin of disobedience, unbelief and ingratitude, which is manifested in this sphere. It is sin, because in it he turns aside from the grace which is given him by God to order his relationship not only to God but also to his fellows, violating the law of this grace and therefore letting himself fall where he is in fact exalted and may and can and should stand.

The nature of sloth can be gauged in our reaction to the divine Yes offered to us in the existence of Jesus Christ. In this way, the origin of our sloth is in Him. It is sloth only in light of the fact that He is what God has elected and supplied for us as our true being and destination. In Him God offers us true knowledge of Him, true humanity, a ‘normal’ personal life (integrity) and faithful acceptance of our limitation (confidence). We however oppose the divine initiative, we turn down our only possible and ‘objective reality’ as in Christ it stands before us. We let ourselves fall into stupidity, inhumanity, dissipation and anxious care. As such our sloth does actually take place as “human corruption”. Its character is “purely negative”. It is “not necessary or genuine …”. In essence, it is “only impossible”

Without any true basis, it “cannot be deduced or explained or excused or justified”. Yet, we do will it and this will is “opposed to the good will of God” and therefore in contradiction to ourselves. As Barth states concerning the first and basic dimension of sloth (ignorance or stupidity): “it is the evil act (üble Tat) of man; of

178 CD IV/2, 475 (537f).
179 CD IV/2, 410 (460f: wo wir uns bewegen lassen und mitgehen, nachfolgen könnten, dürften und sollen).
180 CD IV/2, 434,435 (488, 489).
the whole man … it is his inaction, his responsible and culpable refusal to act”.181

So, regarding its nature and character, we can conclude that our sloth is marked by the very same, senseless opposition to the graceful Yes of God as that of Nothingness of which it is an actualization. As privation, our sloth robs both God and ourselves of the acceptance and further actualization of the grace of true humanity as already given in Jesus Christ.

Surveying the sin of sloth in its different forms, the question occurs to me in how far sloth – as presented by Barth - is actually sloth. In its source and root, sloth is the underlying quality such “that man does not follow” (437 (492);182 that “we are too lazy to follow the movement of God, which lifts us up; that instead we let ourselves sink and fall” (453 (511); 458 (516)). The first and basic association of sloth (Trägheit) is with slowness and inaction, together with powerlessness and pusillanimity, that all belong to the scale of connotations associated with laziness, acedia/inertia.183 However, in most of its actual forms, as pictured by Barth, the character of sloth seems to have a quite different character. Far from being slow and sleepy, the phenomena of slothful action and inaction are rather presented as active, quick and ‘hungry’. Instead of being small and powerless, we are pictured by Barth in our sloth as perfectly self-supportive and deliberately calculating. Not as toothless and tardy, but rather as alert, active and fierce. Thus, Barth can state that “sloth expresses much more clearly than pride the positive and aggressive ingratitude which repays good with evil” (405 (455)).

This may be exemplified by the second form of sloth, inhumanity. Far from being weak and lazy, inhumanity is a “distorted attitude which will necessarily find powerful expression” (434 (489)). Once unleashed, it rapidly develops into a force which “escapes our control … and has its own dynamic”. Renouncing his true humanity, the individual perpetrator will “achieve a kind of liberation and independence”, he will exercise and gain a “superior capacity to act … a peculiar advantage over others and seem to be stronger” (436 (491)). Though alien to himself, he will enjoy it. Personally and inwardly, but also outwardly and collectively, the dynamics of the second species of sloth are extremely “infectious” (436 (492)). No one escapes the common rule that “everyman’s hand is necessarily against his brother’s, and we are all subjects” (436 (491)). This does not entirely sound like sloth.

In fact, sloth is pictured by Barth more in terms of active sin, than inactive faith, rather as the unshackled self-assertion of sinners than as lacking vitality of the true self that we have in Jesus Christ - which it basically is. Even the fourth form of sloth as human care/ anxiousness is taken mainly and basically in terms of intentional action, “responsible transgression” (Verantwortliche Übertretung; 468 (528)), activism being one of its hideouts. The other side of care, the more painful, anxious and pusillanimous side, is not overlooked by Barth, given his reflection on Mt. 6,25ff. Even then, however, human care, as for example fear in face of death, turns out to be basically a negligence which is “culpable” (sträfliches Unterlassen; 470 (531)), it is “the evil of his fear of this frontier” (469 (530)) which leads Barth to wind up this form of sloth as the sin of the “dissatisfied man” (der Unzufriedene), who is the slave of “his need of security” (470f (531)). My point is that sloth is pictured more in terms of hyperactivity of the flesh than as tardy lethargy of faith that lets its great potential unused. In short, sloth as pictured by Barth, has all the characteristics of pride.

7.2.2.b.ii Reality or ontological weight

181 CD IV/2, 411 (462, 463).
182 Abbreviated references in this commenting intermezzo are to CD IV/2.
183 The latin word inertia has the following meanings: 1. unfitness, incapacity; 2. slothfulness, languor, lassitude; 3. lack of courage, pusillanimity. Further associations are slowness, indolence, inertness, dullness, laziness, tardiness (trägheit, Mattigkeit, Schlaffheit, Faulheit).
Although the actual forms of sloth are pictured in terms of severe disobedience and aggressive unbelief violating the order of grace, in itself our sloth is basically groundless according to Barth. As a phenomenon of Nothingness, it reflects in all its forms the same ontological weakness and contingency as its source, having only a second-rate status of reality. We may refuse to be like the one human Jesus Christ – as in fact “we are not He, nor He we”\(^{184}\) – but we cannot undo his existence for us. As Barth states regarding the sloth of our inhumanity,

this human reluctance has again to be considered primarily in its futility (Nichtigkeit). Nothing can alter the fact that the man Jesus is for all not only the light of the knowledge of God, but also the power of humanity. He cannot be dismissed from the world, this One who is the Fellow and Neighbour and Brother of all men. … No absolute fact can be opposed to Him. Nor can anything alter the fact that in Him all men, even the most deformed and unnatural, are elected and created and determined for fellow-humanity, for neighbourly love, for brotherhood. … I can refuse to be the new and neighbourly man that I am already in this One. In this respect too, we can involve ourselves in self-contradiction. But … we cannot destroy ourselves. We cannot destroy the fact that others are there as our fellows … we cannot alter the fact that they do wait for our corresponding action and attitude. … It is our sloth rather than His direction (Weisung) which is futile.\(^{185}\)

Willing that which according to His incarnation God does not will is willing the impossible. If we do, we create some kind of ‘reality’ but this counts for nothing. By no means will it lead to something absolute. It is only a something of second order, a “reality of inferior quality, which is destined to perish”.\(^{186}\) So our sloth, despite all its shamefulness of being evilly opposed to God and to His grace, is finally harmless and powerless. It cannot destroy the human self nor annihilate our true knowledge, humanity, integrity and confidence. Eventually, our sloth has no real substance.

Now, as is restated again and again, the supreme guarantee for all this is the irrevocable existence of the one human being whose outgoing direction “cannot be reversed”. Even then, and remarkably, Barth let the Christological mantra be sided with an additional argument from creation. Seemingly in order to further underline the pointlessness of sloth, he stated with respect to slothful dissipation that

we cannot degenerate to such an extent that we cease to be that which God has created us – men. We can live as though we were … but we cannot actually be spirits or animals or plants. Our souls and bodies constantly proclaim their rights and assert their power, and always in the direction of their original unity in which the soul controls the body and the body serves the soul. Their division, the conflict, the inversion of the order in which man is the soul of his body, is continually shown to be unnatural (widernatürlich). … we ourselves are there no matter how we may contradict ourselves. We protest, with superior right and greater power, against that which we do to ourselves. What we do is ultimately futile.\(^{187}\)

Apparently, the ultimate insubstantiality of slothful dissipation is not only based

\(^{184}\) CD IV/2, 468 (528).
\(^{185}\) CD IV/2, 433 (487, 488).
\(^{186}\) CD IV/2, 434 (488); also 411 (433); 453 (510).
\(^{187}\) CD IV/2, 453 (510f).
on the sovereign humanity we have in Christ but is also secured by the fact that no one can degrade below his or her created order. We ourselves are there no matter how we may contradict ourselves. Thus, the ontological thinness of our sloth – involving a lucky delimitation of its dehumanizing effects – is underscored by the natural or original order which is the well-created order from the Creator. Even with regard to a human’s spiritual stupidity being one’s slothful ignorance of God, Barth seems to be playing with a creational bottom line, by stating that in the depth of his stupidity even a fool man knows that his folly derives from that which is not (aus dem Nichtigen) and consists in his movement towards it. He cannot see what is wrong, but he has instinctive awareness (instinktiv Gewahr sein) like a blind man who is groping towards an abyss. He is frightened to confess or to be told or accused, that he himself belongs to that which is not (zum Nichtigen). He is on the point of realizing it, but he will not accept it. Nor is it really true. He does not belong to nothingness. Even in and in spite of his folly he belongs to God and is the good creature of God. How, then, can he accept and confess that this is not the case?

On the very edge of giving way to Nothingness and confessing oneself to it, any human will start back. Now, this is a rather amazing element in Barth’s argument as well as within the whole of his theology. Is Barth really admitting an autonomous ‘creational’ experience or ‘better impulse’ causing this recoil from the void? Does “instinctive awareness” imply a natural knowledge of Nothingness, more or less apart from the event Jesus Christ? It seems, for a moment, that Barth was indeed suggesting this. But then, we can see him rapidly steering back to familiar waters again when he goes on in providential tones:

May it not even be that … God … keeps him back from this and makes it impossible, that the fact that he has this awareness and is frightened is the work of His gracious hand? This will, of course, only turn to his judgment, to which, in his attempts at concealment, he will react in the most perverse and perverted way.

The slight suggestion of creational or natural knowledge of Nothingness, which implicitly would involve corresponding knowledge of God, is gently bypassed with a “gracious hand”. Nevertheless, in all forms of sloth, at some stage, there is a natural sense of shame and fear, an instinctive repugnance against Nothingness as something utterly impossible. This repugnance, weak and ill directed as it may be, is allowed by Barth to the human being in him/herself; to the human being who, as such, is the good creature of God. However, our creational instinctive shudder for Nothingness, whether additionally caused by actual providence or not, may well lead to further

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188 This ‘creational’ argument is also proposed by Barth concerning the other forms of sloth: with respect to the futility of inhumanity, see CD IV/2, 437 (493); human care, see 469 (529).
189 CD IV/2, 416 (468).
190 This would be very unlikely as Barth has tied the knowledge of Nothingness exclusively to God’s acting in Christ, cf. CD III/3, 366 (424): Indeed we may say that if Nothingness is not viewed in retrospect to God’s finished act of conquest and destruction [sc. in the death and resurrection of Jesus] … it is not seen at all.
191 Continuation of CD IV/2, 416 (468). The working ascribed by Barth to God’s gracious hand might be a fitting example of “the obscure gratia praeveniens”, dismissed by him elsewhere, cf. CD IV/2, 498 (563).
hypocrisy and extra attempts at concealment in order to make our sin look good. And this, unfortunately, will only aggravate the judgment. Now this confronts us with the question regarding our own responsibility - whether we are accountable for our sloth (7.2.2.c) - before, finally (7.3), approaching the matter more positively and asking if it is possible for of a human in him/herself to be and act for the good.

7.2.2.c SLOTH AS AN ACT OR AS FATE

The survey of different forms of sloth has shown that Barth holds us fully responsible, in the sense of being accountable and thus culpable with respect to our sin and sloth. Knowing God, we refuse to recognize Him in practice and remain spiritually ignorant (7.2.2.a.i); we remain in hostility towards others where we could let ourselves be moved to humanity (7.2.2.a.ii). Unwilling to discipline ourselves, we choose to live like tramps (7.2.2.a.iii). Even human care is declared to be due to culpable negligence, and thus considered as “responsible transgression – sin” (7.2.2.a.iv). In all respects, the direction (Weisung) of Jesus Christ as well as the indispensable Holy Spirit are available but we fail to obey the call to genuine freedom and will not let ourselves be restored in confidence.192 Emphasizing that the human being lets himself fall “by his own choice”, Barth makes clear that this is not a “fatality” (nicht Schicksalhaft). One’s practical dissipation, for instance, being the “neglect of our most direct responsibility” can in no way be attributed to an “exculpating and atoning destiny” (Verhängniss). In fact, this form of sloth has its efficacy, says Barth, from the fact that we “want to be … those who can exist only” in dissipated activity or vagabond inactivity193. Now, with respect to the polarities of ‘human responsibility versus fatality’, or ‘freedom versus determinism’ there hovers an ambiguous twilight over the combination “want to be” and “can exist only”. The suggestion is that a human being can only will his dissipation and has no potential to change it.

The ambiguity stems from two aspects of meaning that are implied in “fatality” (< fate, Schicksal, Verhängniss). On the one hand, fatality implies an external cause like a decision made elsewhere; fate, therefore, always comes as a strange intrusion from beyond ourselves. It is not my own choice nor my responsibility. On the other hand, fatality implies, or at least strongly suggests, a situation of determinism, meaning that, possibly as a victim of fate, I have been brought into a predicament that I cannot basically change or leave. Applied to Barth: when denying that our sin and sloth are a matter of fate, he is clearly implying (to deny) the first aspect of fate (Schicksal), since according to him our sin comes from ourselves. But excluding one’s own potential for change, he seems less coherent as regards the second aspect, the point of determinism.

Therefore, in the present subsection, I will relate to Barth’s perspective on the notions that are traditionally discussed in this context, firstly his idea of human bondage as related to sloth (i); and secondly his view on the doctrine of original sin in connection with his notion of Christian freedom (ii); finally, I will summarize the question of sloth as ‘act or fate’ (iii).

192 Cf. CD IV/2, 433 (487); 475 (537f).
193 Italics mine, CD IV/2, 454 (511, 512: “daß wir selbst die – nicht sind, aber von uns aus sein wollen, die dann gar nicht anders als in einem tief und mannigfach verlottern Tun und Lassen existieren können”).
7.2.2.c.I. Sloth and Human Bondage

The second form of sloth resulting in inhumanity is presented as our continual reservation towards our fellow humans. According to Barth this reserve is “common to us all” and cannot be changed by any usual counselling nor through individual transformation, however radical.\textsuperscript{194} Starting from the primary connotation of sloth as slowness or tardiness, one could assume that human transformation can never be radical enough in a quantitative sense. It is, however, not the quantity or power of our will which Barth had in mind, but its quality. It is the character and direction and content of our will. Thus, with respect to personal lassitude and vagabondage as the third form of sloth, Barth observed that

it is a real disposition of the human will (\textit{tatsächliche Beschaffenheit des menschlichen Willens}) and its decisions and achievements. As man does not will to know God, and as he wills to be without and even against his fellow-men, so he wills himself in the disorder, discord and degeneration of his nature, declining to make use of the freedom to be a whole man.\textsuperscript{195}

Again, Barth is clear about one aspect of fatalism. It is not by an external fate, but by his own choosing and willing. The general definition of human sin as sloth is, according to Barth “that he lets himself fall” by his own will.\textsuperscript{196} Yet, within this perspective, the question raises itself whether it is really ‘he’ – the human being him/herself - who can will and do so, because there is no human will in absoluteness, but only in, what Barth called, a “real disposition”. Such “disposition” implies that the origin of all our willing and choosing cannot solely be localized within the actual choices we make because

we have to do with a decision from which we come in the details of what we do and do not do. It is a matter of the basic perversion of the human will which precedes all the great and little aberrations which are possible, necessary and actual in the light of it and in which it takes concrete form. … What takes place in man’s detailed aberrations … [is] in its original form, in its bitter root … nothing other than the disobedience of man, his unbelief, his ingratitude, his enmity against the grace of God directed to him, the transgression of its law. This transgression as such is the law which all his thoughts and words and works will more or less obviously follow.\textsuperscript{197}

All our stirrings are dominated by a “law” – contrary to the law of God and His grace. This “law”, being the reflection of the “real disposition of the human will”, is due to a basic perversion which proceeds from a preceding decision. Still, Barth restates explicitly that this is not meant as a destiny (\textit{Verhängnis}) which would eliminate our most direct responsibility. As in the case of our dissipation, which in particular is a matter of “our dealings with ourselves”, we are responsible because we “want” to be

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\item \textsuperscript{194} \textit{CD} IV/2, 435 (490): “This reserve common to us all is not affected by any admonitions or counter-measures, by any psychology or individual or social pedagogics, by any social revolution or individual conversion, however radical”.
\item \textsuperscript{195} \textit{CD} IV/2, 453 (511).
\item \textsuperscript{196} \textit{CD} IV/2, 453f (511): “Man goes to ruin when he slips from the place which he is allotted by the grace of God. And he does so by his own choice. He lets himself go. He lets himself be pushed. Where he himself can and should be moving and pushing…”
\item \textsuperscript{197} \textit{CD} IV/2, 454 (511, 512).
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and exist as those who we are not. Par excellence, this perversion is at work when someone tries to cope with his sloth by making moral appeals and admonitions for the better. Our sloth, then, will appear as “superior to all morality” and is re-enacted all the time because it is from within ourselves that our sloth draws its inexhaustible strength … That which is born of the flesh and thought and said and chosen and done in the flesh, can only be flesh, and cannot overcome the flesh, even though it may have the character of a most serious and sharp protest against it. … It has a power which is released by man but itself enslaves him. (…) When man has released this power, and is himself enslaved by it, how can he ever be free again? It is dangerous because, in the one form or the other, it is the power of a genuine desire of the heart (Herzenslust) which exercises a distinctive control over man, but also proceeds from within him …

As human beings, we have untied a power which is now beyond control, our will is governed by it. This power or law is located by Barth deeply within the human heart, even though it is clearly escaping our so-called autonomous consciousness or free will. The result is that the human being now has to live in “the determination and character which he gives himself”. In light of our true and royal freedom in Jesus this predicament is exposed as “the determination of our will as servum arbitrium”. Still, the question of whether this implies some form of fatalist determinism is denied by Barth, precisely because this bondage, as he sees it, appears and can only be understood as the counterpart of Christian freedom. Therefore, I now turn to this notion of freedom as related to the human bondage implied in original sin.

7.2.2. Original Sin and Christian Freedom

The description of sloth and misery as resulting from a “basic perversion”, an original “bitter root” due to an original “decision”, is actually Barth’s version of the classic doctrine of original sin. Barth was well aware that original sin, too, has often been associated with fatality and determinism, especially in German-speaking countries where original sin (Ursünde) was mostly designated as hereditary sin (Erbsünde, Dutch: erfzonde). Barth preferred the former term while criticizing the

198 CD IV/2, 454 (512).
199 CD IV/2, 455 (513): “How can human dissipation be arrested when in the first instance it is at work in the man who tries to make the moral appeal …, when he himself is one who in this respect (italics mine) wills what he ought not to will and does not will what he ought?”.
200 CD IV/2, 455-457 (513-515).
201 This is the situation of “the misery of man” that we create in all forms of our sloth, cf. CD IV/2, 483 (546).
202 CD IV/2, 493f (558).
203 Cf. CD IV/2, 494 (559): According to Barth, the assertion of the bondage of the will must be understood “Christologically”. It basically is a theological statement, a statement of faith, only to be made as a corollary to the confession of the freedom which is won for us and granted to us in Jesus Christ. “As such, it has nothing whatever to do with the battle between determinism and indeterminism”. It only “describes the perversion of the human situation which results from the sloth of man in his relationship with God”; also: CD IV/2, 498 (564).
204 See quotation note 195: CD IV/2, 454 (511, 512).
205 See his discussion of the doctrine in the first part of reconciliation in CD IV/1, 499ff (556ff). Barth rejected the term peccatum hereditarium (hereditary sin; Erbsünde) and preferred the term peccatum originale (original sin; Ursünde).
tradition since Augustine of underpinning the universality of the former in terms of the latter. If the transmission of original sin through the generations were caused by means of sexual reproduction, then inherited sin would be “something that I cannot refuse to do” in which case it can hardly be regarded as my own act. Instead, it was stressed by Barth that all sin, original and sequential, is our own. He therefore defined original sin as “the voluntary and responsible life (Lebenstat) of every man”. Original sin, then, is “the sin of every man, the corruption which he brings on himself so that as the one who does so … he is necessarily and inevitably corrupt”. Sure enough, Barth’s criticism against the hereditary aspect was that our submission to the law of sin is not due to Adam’s but to our own decision. In this sense, fatality in the first sense - as external evil inevitably intruding into my life from beyond myself (see 7.2.2.c) - is evaded. Every human being creates his/her own evil choices that make him/her enslaved.

The second aspect of fatality is less clear as it appears that, once having entered on the path of sin and sloth, we cannot choose any more as true humans, which inevitably rings like determinism. Barth seems to exclude the possibility of actually opting for personal transformation. Therefore, the underlying question that remains to be answered is whether it is possible for an individual person to choose for leaving the predicament of slavery and sloth. Can we willingly embark on the road towards genuine freedom as embodied by the God-man?

In order to further trail this problem in his theology, it is important to see that Barth has criticized and redefined the notion of freedom and free will from his explicitly Christological standpoint. The popular or ‘common sense’ image of free will is presented by him as that of a “Hercules at the cross-roads” who can will and decide as he chooses. In this sense, free will is understood as the formal capacity of choosing the one or the other, of following the right way or the left, just as one likes. According to Barth, this formal capacity belongs to human beings as such. But as a definition of freedom it is dismissed as “the imagination of the invincibly ignorant”. Real freedom as revealed in the existence of Jesus is not an empty or formal concept but is filled out with a “positive meaning”. Real freedom is a capacity according to which “man can be genuinely man as God who has given him this capacity can in His freedom be genuinely God”. It is the God-given potential of being “genuinely [hu] man in fellowship with God”. When the given capacity is actually practiced and the freedom exercised, this is grounded on the human side in a “definite choice” to embrace the divine fellowship and act accordingly, in faith and obedience, in gratitude and loyalty to God.

206 CD IV/1, 500, 501 (557, 558: “Ursünde ...: die sich ereignende höchst willentliche, höchst verantwortliche Lebenstat eines jeden Menschen ...”).
207 CD IV/2, 496 (561): “And on this path, however he may choose, he cannot choose as a true man … , but in all his choices, having yielded to corruption, he can only act corruptly”. That the question of determinism with respect to the existential predicament of sin and sloth is not yet answered satisfactory also follows from CD IV/2, 93 (102f): “It is not really of necessity, but only in fact, that human nature wills to sin, and does sin, and therefore can sin. (…) And it is only as we actually do it that it shows itself to be a determination of our human essence which, although we cannot shake it off, is supremely inappropriate and improper” (italics ffo).
208 CD IV/2, 494 (559: Der freie Mensch ist der Mensch, der in seiner Gemeinschaft mit Gott wahrhaft Menschen sein kann).
209 See CD IV/2, 494 (559); and then also, of course, in loyalty to one’s neighbour, one’s own spiritual-
Clearly, Barth’s theological-anthropological notion of real Christian freedom is far removed from the empty, formal-ontological notion of freedom, and thus, from the in itself empty capacity of choosing either to sin (posse peccare) or not to sin (posse non peccare). To a real free person in the Barthian sense, a formal disengaged attitude of ‘anything goes’ or ‘do as you like or choose’ is out of the question. To one who has Christian freedom, sin is no real option at all as it stands in contrast to the “genuine possibility offered by God”. Of the real free human being, one must say: “non potest peccare”. Real freedom is the “capacity granted … by God” that “excludes the possibility of sinning”. This freedom in Barthian sense can remind us of the donum perseverantiae that Augustine advocated for in his confrontation with the semi-Pelagian monks (1.1.3). Real Christian freedom is a divine gift to humans, bestowing the effective inclination or capacity to do well in faith, obedience, and loyalty, primarily to God and consequently to one’s own being human in the other three anthropological relationships.

Thus, opposite to the real free human being stands the one who lives, says Barth, in the “perversion of the human situation which results from the sloth of man in his relationship with God”. In this unfree situation, one finds oneself in a predicament of bondage of the will. This, however, does not mean that a person “cannot any longer will and decide, i.e. that he is deprived of arbitrium or has no will at all”. If this were the case, one would no longer be a human being. Actually, genuine or Christian freedom is far away from the “Hercules” possibility to will and choose as one likes. Formal freedom belongs to being human. But when someone’s formal freedom includes actually opting and choosing for sin, then one loses his/her genuine freedom. This is because

He can have his [genuine] freedom only as he uses it, in the choice of the possibility which corresponds to it. If he does not use it, he goes out into the absolute void of a being in unbelief and disobedience and ingratitude, into a being which is no true being. And this means that he loses it. He does not have it. There is no freedom in this unreal being and for those who turn to it. It is eo ipso the sphere of bondage. As a sinner man has decided against his freedom to be genuinely man. And in this decision he will necessarily continue to decide against it. … Non potest non peccare is what we have to say of the sinful, slothful man. His sin excludes his freedom, just as his freedom excludes his sin. There is no middle position. For the slothful man there is only the first alternative. He has not ceased to be a man. He wills. He is a Hercules, the arbiter of what he does. But he does what he does in the corruption of his will. He does not, therefore, do it libero but servo arbitrio.

The situation described here is not that of a Christian believer but of a sinner indulging in his sloth. Regarding the former it was stated above that, when the godly gift of genuine freedom is actually bestowed on someone, then on the human part it is received and grounded in one’s affirmation, in one’s saying Yes in faith and obedience.

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210 CD IV/2, 494f (559f); cf. also 495 (560): diametrically opposed to the genuinely free person for whom sin is no real option is the one who needs both options to feel free. Barth observes: “The man who has or can desire this possibility [sc. of sin] is already the man who is not free and who must desire it”.

211 CD IV/2, 494 (559).

212 CD IV/2, 495 (559-561).
For the slothful sinner who has not (yet) been graced with the divine gift, the situation is totally different. As long as Christian freedom is not bestowed upon him, there simply is nothing from God for him to accept or affirm. Neither is there any capability in himself to shake off his sloth or bring about some change in his bondage as sinner. As he will necessarily decide against true freedom there appears to be a complete non posse with respect to its acquisition. What remains is only the “first alternative”, namely of sin and sloth. One can choose whatever one likes, except the most essential. And there is “no middle position”, says Barth, implying that there is no viable, gradual way running from bondage in sloth and sin towards Christian freedom as granted by God. Both alternatives are presented by Barth as mutually exclusive.

7.2.2.c.III. ACT OR FATE?

Now, given these assumptions, determinism is unmistakably lurking around the corner. It seems to me that one can only evade it through accepting a clue, however minimal of human potential, a sort of ‘continuum’ of ‘stepping-stone’ between yes and no. As occurred to me by association: there must be a sort of fomes boni or obedientiae in us, a ‘firelighter’ implying at least a minimal capacity to see, and then to desire and pray, as well as take a first step, however small, to turn away from the bondage of acting randomly as you like; an disposition to, at least, strive and opt for genuine freedom; to invite it in or start moving towards it, both in spirit and in bodily existence. In fact, what I have in mind is hardly different from Barth’s unexpected suggestion of “instinctive awareness” (7.2.2.b.ii). To the extent that such a preliminary and mediating aptitude within humans towards the true humanity in Christ is denied, one inevitably falls back into some form of double predestination, so unambiguously reprobated by Barth in Calvin.

The logical conclusion is that to evade determinism the concept of human potential must include a human capability to choose and actually opt for sanctification. Similarly, such a capability is also a precondition for reasonably speaking of the shamefulness of sloth. Strictly speaking, it is a precondition for rightly or adequately speaking of ‘sloth’ in the first place! Therefore, the question to bear in mind in the final part of this paragraph is to what extent it can be my own willing, choosing and acting to move myself away from under the one determinant and go for the other. A minimal ‘potential’ is required to counter the reproach of determinism.

7.3 HUMAN POTENTIAL: THE HUMAN SELF AND SANCTIFICATION

The question of human potential is closely linked to the theological subject of sanctification. Both concern the associated phenomena of (inner) knowledge of the divine and human transformation and/or self-realization. In either respect, the relevant questions are about the determining conditions that promote or obstruct change and growth, either spiritually or existentially; and: who or what is the acting agent, the ultimate subject to that change? To introduce Barth’s position, I start with

213 The notion fomes boni as a sort of ‘kindling’ or ‘firelighter’ for the good occurred to me through association with the inverted or mirror image fomes peccati which is a notion in Medieval hamartiology. In order to account for the (re-)occurrence of actual sin, after (original) sin was supposed to be washed away by baptism, Thomas and others adopted a remaining inclination to sin, associated with concupiscence, and which they designated as fomes peccati, forming a possible ignition point or cause for actual sin, see: Weber, Grundlagen (I), 664.

214 See for Barth’s repudiation of Calvin’s doctrine, CD IV/2, 520.
the first subsection of his paragraph on *The Sanctification of Man*, dealing with the relationship between *Justification and Sanctification* (*CD*, §66.1). As God turns himself to the human being in defiance of his sin, it is by the very same move that He turns the human being to Himself. This means, according to Barth, that Justification and Sanctification have to be considered as “two different aspects of the one event of salvation”.\(^{215}\) Although having a different bearing, both aspects are “indissolubly bound up”\(^{216}\) and must be understood within God’s “unitary action” of reconciliation. This is the one divine grace, embodied in “the one whole and undivided Jesus Christ …”.\(^{217}\) Fine-tuning the togetherness of both aspects even with Chalcedonic distinctions,\(^{218}\) Barth criticized the perspective of the so-called *ordo salutis*. This concept was offered by many 17th century Protestant theologians describing salvation as a *process*. In their view justification and sanctification represent two different steps, taking place in a temporal sequence, the former accomplished on Golgotha, the latter taking place in ordinary humans, as the implementation of the former through the working of the Holy Spirit. Although it was not their primary intention, it could only lead to the deployment of a “series of spiritual awakenings … and states of a religious and moral type”. By the time of Pietism and Enlightenment, theology had been pushed aside by religious and moral psychology. A positive exception in this matter was Quenstedt, stating that the workings of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, and “particularly justification and sanctification, take place *tempore simul*”. Had this been taken seriously, as Barth observed, there would have been no supposed dualism between “an objective achievement of salvation there and then, and a subjective appropriation of it here and now”.\(^{219}\) Instead it would have been recognized that

> the simultaneity of the one act of salvation whose Subject is the one God by the one Christ through the one Spirit – (is) ‘more closely united than in a mathematical point’. The God who in His humiliation justifies us is also the man who in His exaltation sanctifies us. He is the same there and then as He is here and now. He is the one living Lord in whom all things have occurred, and do and will occur, for all (italics ffo).\(^{220}\)

Presented like this, Christology seems to have swallowed the entire *ordo salutis* which is supposed to have taken place entirely in the all-encompassing event Jesus Christ. Barth’s key motive to acclaim the *simul* character of the first two *beneficia* of atonement is to emphasize their Subject, who is no other than the living Lord. For the same reason he preferred the term Sanctification instead of other, less biblical ones like *regeneratio, renovatio, conversio, poenitentia*. In contrast to these, the term *sanctificatio* (*CD* IV/2, 500 (566):)

> shows us at once that we are dealing with the being and action of God, reminding us …

\(^{215}\) *CD* IV/2, 503 (569).

\(^{216}\) *CD* IV/2, 499 (565).

\(^{217}\) *CD* IV/2, 501f (568).

\(^{218}\) Cf. *CD* IV/2, 503 (569f): “asunchutoos and atreptoos” and 505 (572): “achoristoos and adiairetoos”: what has been said of the two natures of Christ also counts for God’s turning in grace towards us (our justification) and ‘our’ turning – rather: our being turned by God – to God (sanctification): in Christ, both events occur unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, and inseparably.

\(^{219}\) *CD* IV/2, 502 (568); 502f. (569).

\(^{220}\) *CD* IV/2, 503 (569).
of the basic and decisive fact that God is the active Subject not only in reconciliation generally but also in the conversion of man to Himself. Like His turning to man and man’s justification, this is His work, His facere. But it is now seen and understood, not as His justificare, but as His sanctificare”. 221

Now, with respect to justification, Barth had unequivocally adopted the orthodox Protestant doctrine that God (in Christ and through the Holy Spirit) is the one and only acting Subject of our Justification. 222 And the main point to explore with respect to our Human potential is to what extent Barth was really suggesting the same casting vis-à-vis our Sanctification. The question thus is in what proportion the One acting Subject (God in Jesus Christ) and the many minor co-subjects (ordinary humans) relate to one another in the case of Sanctification. What is human participation in this? In particular, what is the actual human contribution to his/her Sanctification? The handling of these questions will reveal Barth’s perspective on the human role and the human potential.

For this aim, I will trace down Barth’s position, firstly by paying attention to his distinction between sanctification de iure and sanctification de facto, the former being the presupposition of the latter (7.3.1 Two dimensions of Sanctification). I will work this out in the subsequent parts. The second part explores Barth’s presentation of the way our sanctification is brought about by God, namely through the event of Jesus Christ (7.3.2 The Sanctification by Christ). The third part is devoted to the active role of the human being in being sanctified (7.3.3 Participation by us).

7.3.1 Two dimensions of Sanctification

In a section “The Holy One and the Saints”, Barth again takes sides against the perspective of a ordo salutis, 223 especially against the suggestion that, having been justified by Jesus Christ as our Representative, it is now up to us to elevate ourselves to fellowship with God. Sanctification would then take place, similar to some sort of do ut des principle, as our corresponding countermovement. But this is not the perspective of the New Testament, says Barth. Jesus is not only the suffering ´Son of God´ on our behalf but he is the victorious ´Son of Man´ as well. And he is this latter, too, “in our place and favour”. This means that we are saints and sanctified because “we are already sanctified, already saints, in this One”. Just as ‘creation’ was realized already before humankind entered the stage, so is our “new form of existence as God’s covenant-partner”: we do not have “to achieve it by imitation”, we only have to “see and accept [it] as an accomplished fact …and to direct ourselves accordingly”. 224

On the one hand, Barth seems to be discouraging active, human involvement in

221 CD IV/2, 500 (566)
222 CD IV/2, 511f (578f), §66,2 The Holy One and the Saints (Der Heilige und die Heiligen); esp. 521 (589).
223 CD IV/2, 511f (578f), §66,2 The Holy One and the Saints (Der Heilige und die Heiligen); esp. 521 (589).
224 CD IV/2, 516 (584).
Sanctification as he denies any “prior or subsequent contribution that we can make to its accomplishment”. Just as we cannot justify ourselves and are not even asked to attempt it, so “we are not asked to sanctify ourselves”. But then, on the other hand, he is adding right away that “our sanctification consists in our participation in His sanctification”. The question prompting itself is what our “participation” can mean when it does not involve any “contribution” from our side. The answer has to do with Barth’s distinction between our Sanctification de iure (a) and Sanctification de facto (b).

7.3.1.a. Sanctification de iure

The statement about the one living Lord in whom “all things have occurred, and do and will occur, for all” concerns what Barth has designated as our Sanctification de iure. Prior to any possible addition or cooperation from ourselves, our Sanctification de iure is realized as our new form of existence in Christ. As such, it is relevant and valid to all people, whether they know it or not. It is the content-matter and basis of Barthian realism which is beyond human acclamation or rejection, belief or unbelief. The human being’s sanctification de iure is his or her Sanctification in Christ and is the presupposition of all possible sanctification de facto.

Now there is something ‘remarkable’ in Barth’s applying the qualification ‘de iure’ to sanctification. As primarily a juridical notion its proper affinity is to justification. Its application to sanctification thus shows how close the second gift of salvation is drawn to the first, almost to the verge of identification. Especially concerning the question of the acting S/subject and a possible division of roles, sanctification is fashioned very much after its “dominating presupposition” which, according to Barth, is justification. Barth warns us not to confuse justification and sanctification by letting the former “merge into” the process of the latter but appears himself to be in danger of doing the opposite, namely letting sanctification be drawn into justification. As a result, his understanding of sanctification has a highly synthetic character which is similar to the doctrine of so called ‘synthetic justification’. Synthetic with respect to justification means that we are declared ‘just’ by God, not based on the analysis of what we actually are, but only on the benevolence of the One Who justifies. It is from here that we can be said to be simul justus (by divine declaration) et peccator (which we are in ourselves). Now Barth envisions sanctification and our supposed sanctity along the same lines. According to him, all humans are sanctus de iure in Christ – just like all humans are iustus in Him. They are “holy people” but not in the ordinary

\[225 \text{CD IV/2, 517 (585).}\]
\[226 \text{CD IV/2, 511 (578v); 521 (589); 522v (591).}\]
\[227 \text{CD IV/2, 503 (569).}\]
\[228 \text{CD IV/2, 511 (578v): The Sanctification of man, his conversion to God, is, like his justification, a transformation, a new determination, which has taken place de iure for the world and therefore for all men.}\]
\[229 \text{This can be seen as a parallel to the seeming identification of sloth and pride, see 7.2.2.b.i.}\]
\[230 \text{CD IV/2, 504 (570); according to Barth, Roman Catholic theology let justification to be merged into sanctification. Similarly, Bultmann: he allowed “faith in Jesus Christ as the Judge judged in our place ... to merge into the obedience of ... discipleship”. Barth seems to go the other way, vigorously stressing the dominance of justification; see also CD IV/2, 507 (574) where Barth concludes that, largely, justification should be understood “as the first and basic and to that extent superior moment and aspect of the one event of salvation, and sanctification as the second and derivative and to that extent inferior”.}\]
descriptive or analytical sense. Instead they are declared holy with an alien sanctity
(aliena sanctitas), which, seemingly, is attributed to them by forensic imputation.

Illumining his point with biblical data Barth observes that the term “holy people” is used
with “astonishing infrequency”. Instead of envisioning actual sanctity of humans, the main
focus within the Scriptures is on the act of sanctification itself, or rather “on the One who as the
Holy One is the active subject”.231

With respect to the word of Lev.19,2 Barth states that the command ‘Ye shall be holy’ is “simply
the imperative indication of the irresistible dynamic of the indicative ‘for I … am holy’”.
All humans - and even Israel - are sanctified not by their own but by the glory of Yahweh
comparable to the way the tent of meeting (Ex.29,43) was sanctified. For those concerned,
His act of sanctifying them involves a modification of their situation and constitution of which
they “have to deduce the consequences”. But their sanctification by Him - together with the
adjoining adjustment of their actions to His service - is a manifestation of divine power. As such
it is “wholly and exclusively His own act, and not theirs”.232 This picture of the Old Testament
is confirmed, says Barth, by an even more restrained and less analytical use of the term ‘holy’
in the New Testament. Concerning I Pet. 2,9: ‘Ye are … a holy nation’, Barth observes that the
verb ἐστε is actually missing. Therefore, it is not to be considered “an analytical statement”.
Similarly, with respect to Eph. 5,24-27, Barth observes that the supposed holiness of the church
community and its being without blemish is to be seen: “not as an inherent quality but as the
character which He will give it” by His sanctifying action.233

Thus, we may be saints de iure, while actually being all but holy. Being sanctus in the analytical
sense, that is, holy in practical human existence or holy through actual covenant-partnership with
God, is something that cannot be said of the many but only of the “one man who on the human
level is marked off from all others”, namely, Jesus Christ. If truth be told the sanctification of the
many in Him “is the sanctification of Him and not of them. [It] is originally and properly His and
not theirs”.234 Therefore, they are holy “in the truth and power of His holiness”, they are saints:
“not propria, but aliena sanctitate; sanctitate Jesu Christi”.235 I note, again, that this is remarkably
similar if not identical to the argumentation used in the doctrine of justification.236

The high degree of identity with justification is further confirmed when it appears
that all that has been said by now about the only acting Subject, both in justification
and in sanctification, must be seen as the presupposition of our sanctification de facto.237 Therefore, we now turn to the field of our actual sanctification taking place
in ordinary human existence. I will do so while keeping in mind the question to what
extent and in what form co-activity of ordinary women and men is supposed to take
part in this. What can be their contribution?

7.3.1.b. Sanctification de facto
We may now expect to arrive at the appropriate place for facing the human part of
sanctification. It is here that we have to ask, as Barth puts it,

231 CD IV/2, 511v. (579); 513 (580): The Holy One constitutes the saints … the Holy One … is the active
Subject of sanctification.
232 CD IV/2, 501 (567).
233 CD IV/2, 512 (579v).
234 CD IV/2, 514 (58).
235 CD IV/2, 518 (586).
236 See n. 222 with reference to CD IV/1, 549 (613).
237 Both Justification and Sanctification de iure are said to be the dominating presupposition (Voraussetzung)
of Sanctification (cf. CD IV/2, 504 (571)) and Sanctification de facto respectively (cf. CD IV/2, 521
(589)).
how the transition is made from this presupposition (Voraussetzung) to the participation of the saints, of the particular people of God in the world, to the sanctification which has come on them de facto. How do they become witnesses of that which has come on the whole world and all men in the one Jesus Christ? What is the happening which constitutes it this particular people of God armed and commissioned with this witness?238

Seemingly, sanctification de facto is about ordinary men and women and their participation. Factual or actual sanctification takes place when the transition is made from Christ to those who de facto start taking part in His sanctity, bearing witness to Him. So, here is the locus where an understanding of proper, actual sanctification may be expected. The doctrine of factual sanctification has to show, says Barth, that “it really is with man that God is on his way” when reconciling the world with Himself.239 It must show in what way it becomes realized that the reconciled human being is really transformed, that is to say, transformed de facto, instead of being “only touched outwardly and not changed”.240 It must show what the “Christ created participation of the saints in the sanctity of Jesus Christ” – which Barth finds so exemplary being asserted by Calvin241 - actually signifies concerning the human subject.

In the next two sections I will work out how this was elaborated by Barth. Firstly, I will describe that sanctification de facto is “Christ created” (7.3.2 The Sanctification by Christ) and secondly that it results in participation by men (7.3.3 Participation by us).

7.3.2 The Sanctification by Christ

Elaborating his view on actual sanctification, Barth has approvingly referred to Calvin’s doctrine of sanctification in the third book of Institutes. His reaching out to the reformer with velvet gloves did not, however, happen without some intriguing alterations.242 Calvin’s understanding of Sanctification (which in Barthian terms is Sanctification de facto) is perfectly indicated in the opening chapter of Institutes III: “The Benefits of Christ made available to us by the Secret Operation of the Spirit”.243 Thus, according to Calvin, the actual implementation of what we have in Christ de iure is carried out by the arcana operatio Spiritus. In place of the secret operation by the Spirit, however, Barth favours Jesus Christ himself as the executing agency. Therefore, he rather refers to the direction (Weisung) of Christ, directio Christi. In this way, Barth can emphasize that it is Jesus Christ himself who is creating saints by giving them direction (Weisung).244 The direction Christ is executing has a critical and a positive

238 CD IV/2, 521 (589: Wie kommt es … “zu der ihnen de facto widerfahrenden Heiligung”).
239 CD IV/2, 505 (572).
240 CD IV/2, 10 (9).
241 CD IV/2, 522 (591).
242 With regard to Barth’s reception of Calvin’s doctrine of sanctification, see: Den Dulk, Als twee die Spreken. Den Dulk is to credit for observing Barth’s reluctance with respect to the “secret operation of the Spirit” and his substituting it with “participatio Christi” (Den Dulk, 51). Below, I will discuss this further and reflect on what Barth (tacitly?, but actually) effected with this alteration (see my lengthy Intermezzo at the end of 7.3.2.c.iii).
243 Calvin, Institutes, Book III, the title of Caput I. I have used Institutes of the Christian Religion (translation by H. Beveridge; and Opera Selecta (= Institutio Christianae Religionis 1559, librum III), ed. P. Barth & W. Niesel, Caput 1: Quae de Christo dicta sunt, nobis prodesse, arcana operatione Spiritus.
244 Cf. CD IV,2, 523 (591): “Hence, the sanctification of man as the work of the Holy Spirit has to be
side. In the following subsections I will, firstly, outline the former, describing this direction as a twofold attack on our sin, meant to make the human sinner into someone of the past (7.3.2.a. Disturbance and limitation). Secondly and thirdly, I will review the positive or affirmative impact of the directio Christi which puts humans in a new situation, apparently challenging a new potential. Thus, I will describe successively the call to actually look to Jesus (7.3.2.b. The call to discipleship) and the awakening to lift up ourselves (7.3.2.c. The awakening to conversion).

Finally, in a tangential discussion, I will pay attention to the reception and alteration of Calvin by Barth. While stressing unequivocally the direction of Christ as the central sanctifying faculty in his own conception, Barth is labelling Calvin’s perspective on Sanctification consequently as ‘participatio Christi’, an alteration that was noticed by Den Dulk. This alteration results in a strange ambiguity in Barth’s use of participatio Christi which is difficult to catch (Intermezzo 7.3.2.c.iv: Directio Christi, participatio Christi, and operatio Spiritus).

7.3.2.a. Disturbance and limitation
Sanctification takes place de facto when direction (Weisung) falls vertically and with divine power into the lives of those to whom it is given.

‘Saints’ are those whose existence is affected and radically altered and re-determined by the fact that they receive direction in a particular address of the One who alone is holy. He creates saints by giving them direction. … He does so forcefully, not merely in words but in acts, in His whole existence, and all-comprehensively in His death. … They ... hear Him ... effectively – as a call to obedience. … It is in this way that He shares with them … His own holiness; man’s new form of existence as the true covenant-partner of God.245

The first incision in the lives of ordinary humans caused by this direction, by His ‘sharing a new form of existence’ with them, is that those who are reached by it are disturbed as sinners in a way they can’t resist. As they are confronted by “the Holy One and .. by the .. kingdom and will of God”, the direction that in this way touches them is “an active protest” against what they used to do and still do as slothful sinners in their lowness. The result is that they become “His saints as those who are effectively disturbed”, i.e., disturbed in their sin and sloth.246

Another and even more penetrating incision made by the given direction is that “a limit is set to their being sinners”. Within this limit, they are still sinners, but this ‘within’ is no longer all there is in them. What Barth is saying comes down to the idea that being sanctified, a human being is changing from a ‘sinner-only’ to one who is both a sinner and a saint, simul sanctus et peccator. This is due to the fact that the former ‘sinner-only’ is invaded and attacked, so to speak, by the direction of Christ, by God’s immanent kingdom, by His will which is done for man. In this way, God is claiming him as His partner, negating his being a sinner and destroying the binding force of his sloth. Thus, sanctification is an “overwhelming limitation” described as the giving and receiving of direction”. The notion ‘directio Christi’ is my fabrication and is meant as a synonym of ‘the direction of Jesus Christ’ or ‘the direction of the Son’ (die Weisung des Sohnes). Christ is the subject, the one who gives direction, implying that the genitive in direction Christi is a genitivus subjectivus. See further the tangential discussion in 7.3.2.c.iv.

245 CD IV/2, 522f. (591f).
246 CD IV/2, 524, 525 (593, 594).
(übermächtige Begrenzung) to the extent that one’s still being a sinner is pushed into a corner. One’s sin is unmasked as having reality “only in virtue of ’that which is not’ (vom Nichtigen her)” whereas the one thing that counts is the “divine reality” having its basis in the elevation of Jesus Christ. In short, the truth of the directio Christi and its critical impact on humans as sinners is that the ground has already been cut from under their sinful being and acting. According to Barth, this concerns all men de iure. The difference between the people of the world and those of God is that the latter know it and may begin to live accordingly. But so far, the saints are sanctified not through their own action or participation but through the active impact of Christ taking part in their lives: participatio Christi of which not we, but Jesus Christ is the Subject.

7.3.2.b. The call to discipleship

Both critical concretions of directio Christi have a positive counterpart. Firstly, sinners are not only disturbed in their sin but their “existence is positively placed under a new determination” as well. Being disturbed by the No of God, it is by the divine Yes that “they are called” (present subsection). Further, their being sinners is not only forced into a limited corner, but the free space thus created must be filled with “the capacity, the ability, the freedom” to lift themselves up. This happens when they are awakened (next subsection).

The substance of the call by Jesus, through which humans are made His saints, is the “follow me”, the call to discipleship which is the title of a subsection in Barth’s paragraph 66: “The Sanctification of man”. Barth shows himself happy to lean on Bonhoeffer’s Nachfolge (transl. Discipleship) to the extent that he feels tempted simply to reproduce it in an extended quotation. Nevertheless, a significant change of emphasis between the two is mirrored already in the title: Barth’s main focus is on the call to discipleship, not on discipleship itself. Neither its content, nor the individual disciple’s reaction to the call, seems to be of great importance. This is because, according to Barth, there can be “no … presuppositions on the part of those who are called”: no prior “capacity or equipment”, nor “any latent faith … [or] any inward or outward preparation”. The secret of those who are effectively called is not their own. Their secret, says Barth, is that of the One who calls them. The One who calls, the Teacher, seems to be more important than the content and the reception of his teaching. Regarding the content, Barth observes that discipleship is not primarily aiming at the execution of a plan. Nor is it directed at adopting “a program, ideal or law, or the attempt to fulfil it”. In practice, to follow Jesus is “to be with Him” which

247 CD IV/2, 526 (595).
248 CD IV/2, 526f (595f).
249 CD IV/2, 530 (600).
250 Bonhoeffer, Discipleship; German original: Nachfolge.
251 §66,3 The Call to Discipleship (Der Ruf in die Nachfolge), CD IV/2, 533-553 (603-626), esp. 533 (604).
252 CD IV/2, 535 (605f). Barth gives the example of Levi who is addressed by Jesus at the receipt of custom: ‘follow me’ (Mk.2,14f). Both the fact that Levi is addressed and that he proceeds at once to obey have nothing to do with his own moral and religious qualifications. The secret of Levi, says Barth, is “that of the One who calls him”.

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is the same as “to believe in Him”.\textsuperscript{253}

With respect to the reception of the call to follow Him, Barth maintains that, no matter if it comes to man for the first or the hundredth time, it always involves the summons to take a definite “first step”. But whereas he is adopting this notion directly from his estimated man in front, Barth is actually changing it into its opposite. According to Bonhoeffer, this first step should

be viewed as an external deed which exchanges one mode of existence for another. Anyone can take that step. People are free to do that. It is a deed within the \textit{iustitia civilis}, within which people are free. Peter cannot convert himself, but he can leave his nets. In the Gospels that first step consists of a deed which affects all of one’s life.\textsuperscript{274}

Apparently having faith is no precondition for taking this first step. The potential to take it belongs to the common sphere of civil right, to human existence as such. Bonhoeffer gives also the rather harmless example of a non-Christian deciding on a Sunday morning to go to church, which is something one can do on account of one’s ordinary human freedom.\textsuperscript{255}

In the hands of Barth, however, Bonhoeffer’s first step is altered thoroughly. On the one hand, it is changed into a step that can only be taken in faith. On the other, it is no longer a relatively harmless act that one can decide to do freely and relatively easily. By contrast, the first step to discipleship that one has to take in faithful obedience to Jesus,

is distinguished from every other step that he may take by the fact that in relation to the whole of his previous life and thinking and judgment it involves a right-about turn and therefore a complete break and new beginning. To follow Jesus means to go beyond oneself in a specific action and attitude, and therefore to turn one’s back upon oneself, to leave oneself behind.\textsuperscript{256}

In fact, the first step according to Barth, is nothing less than “the definite loosing of a man from himself”. More than only an “inner withdrawal from oneself”, it requires a “breach of the covenant … with oneself” and with one’s previous life.\textsuperscript{257} A merely inward and mental movement will not do. The call to discipleship has only been heard when it “is heard and taken seriously as a call to self-denial”.\textsuperscript{258}

In this way the positive call to discipleship and taking a first step is bent back again into the critical concept of disturbance. The notion of disturbance which is inherent

\textsuperscript{253} \textit{CD} IV/2, 536 (607), where Barth observes with respect to the ‘follow me command’: “For the only possible content of this command is that this or that specific man to whom it is given should come to, and follow, and be with the One who gives it”. To come to Him “is the one complete work which he is called to do. We may say, therefore, that in practice the command to follow Jesus is identical with the command to believe in Him”.

\textsuperscript{254} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Discipleship}, 64 (53); the page number in brackets refers to the German original.

\textsuperscript{255} Bonhoeffer, \textit{o.c.}, 64f. (54): “Come to the church! You can do that on the strength of your human freedom. You can leave your house on Sunday and go to hear the preaching”. According to Den Dulk, \textit{Als twee die spreken}, 124f, Bonhoeffer has later nuanced the simplicity of this presentation. But my (ffo) point is the way Barth has used and changed Bonhoeffer’s first step as presented in \textit{Discipleship}.

\textsuperscript{256} \textit{CD} IV/2, 538 (609).

\textsuperscript{257} \textit{CD} IV/2, 539 (610).

\textsuperscript{258} \textit{CD} IV/2, 542 (614).
to being called, is both radicalized and extended from the individual self to the entire world:

While it is a matter of the personal self of the individual called by Jesus, of the dissolution of the covenant with himself, the self-denial is only a kind of culminating point in the great attack in which he is called to participate as His witness, and which he has to recognize and support as in the first instance an attack upon himself. If we are not ready to deny ourselves, of what use can we be as witnesses of the great assault which is directed against the world (…) in and with the coming of the kingdom? Our self-denial, and the first step … stand in the service of this great onslaught.259

Self-denial as dissolution with oneself appears to be the individual reflection of the major and fundamental opposition of the kingdom of God versus the kingdoms of the world. This is described by Barth as God’s own “coup d’état” (Revolution Gottes), His “great assault” (großen Angriff), proclaimed and accomplished in the existence of the man Jesus. His appearance involves God’s destruction of all “so-called ‘given factors’, all the supposed natural orders, all the historical forces” with claims of “absolute validity and worth”. Initially, we have created these powers ourselves. We have placed them “as authorities… as ‘gods’ between God and man, but also between man and his fellows”,260 thus filling the world with our self-made godlike absolutes that subsequently dominate us.261 Barth gives a two levelled answer to the question in what way, by what, or by whom these powers are to be broken. Basically and at large, it is “the kingdom, the revolution, of God which breaks, which has already broken them”. But then, this “great onslaught” by God in Jesus must become history and this is “why Jesus calls His disciples”.262 The result is that the all-encompassing break, enforced by the One, is reflected on the individual scale in the call to discipleship. But Barth makes clear that even on the small scale of individual humans the “call to discipleship makes a break. It is not the obedient man who does it”.263 The real break is caused by the One, who is calling, not by the one who is responding.

This puts us again face to face with Barthian realism: the real breaking down of sinful, self-made powers on the individual scale takes place in the call that is ‘yelled out’ by the Christ event. From there it is irresistibly promulgated to anyone in the world. Behind and underneath this call – and whence it derives its breaking power – is “God’s destruction, accomplished in the existence of the Son of Man”. Only this is really r e a l ! In relationship to this reality we have to realize that, by obeying the call to discipleship and in our own subsequent action(s), we “can never accomplish more than an indication, demonstration and attestation of this break”. With respect to the individual human being, Barth puts it rather bluntly: “If he is not to be disobedient, what option has he but to do as he is told?”264 The only option one seems to have

259 CD IV/2, 543 (614f).
260 CD IV/2, 543 (615).
261 Cf. CD IV/2, 544 (615): Barth mentions as examples of these divinized ‘ absolutes’: material possession (“mammon of unrighteousness” in Lk. 16,9), earthly honour and fame, the veneration of wealth and power, the worth of family, racial or even religious attachment, see his elaboration: CD IV, 548-553 (620-626).
262 CD IV/2, 544 (615f)
263 CD IV/2, 543 (614), italics mine.
264 CD IV/2, 543 (615, 614).
is to correspond to a reality that, unfortunately, is hardly lessened by one’s no, nor increased by one’s yes.

My last observation might well be contradicted by Maarten den Dulk, who has written a thorough dissertation on this very chapter of *Church Dogmatics* in the 1980s.265 In his exposition, Den Dulk has meticulously compared Barth to, one is tempted to say, the original text of Bonhoeffer, especially with respect to the quote I have cited above in italics: “The call to discipleship makes a break”. Although Barth had been reading Bonhoeffer closely and felt tempted to quote him at length, this did not prevent him, says Den Dulk,266 from following entirely his own course. Bonhoeffer had written:

> “Jesus’ call itself already breaks the ties with the naturally given surroundings in which a person lives. It is not the disciple who breaks them: Christ himself broke them as soon as he called”.267

This has been taken in by Barth as follows:

> “The call to discipleship makes a break. It is not the obedient man who does it … It is the call of Jesus going out into the world and accepted by him, which makes the break; which has already made it”.268

So far, both men have agreed that the “break” (Bruch) is made and enforced by Christ, by his call. But what is actually meant by this? Where does this break lead to? Bonhoeffer’s view is this:

> “Christ has untied the person’s immediate connection with the world and bound the person immediately to himself”.269

According to Den Dulk,270 this had been deliberately skipped by Barth, who stipulated his own understanding of the break as follows:

> “The kingdom of God is revealed in this call; the kingdom which is among the kingdoms of this world, but which confronts and contradicts and opposes them; the coup d’état of God proclaimed and accomplished already in the existence of the man Jesus”.271

Den Dulk then explains that the notions “kingdom” and “coup d’état” (Revolution Gottes) are keywords that Barth once adopted from the religious-socialists Kutter and Ragaz. By using these notions, says Den Dulk, Barth intended to correct Bonhoeffer to the extent that “He wanted to emphasize much stronger (than Bonhoeffer) the societal and political relevance of the Gospel: the society-changing and revolutionary power of the kingdom of God”.271 Stated in that way, one can hardly disagree. As clearly fits in with his realism, Barth puts all emphasis on the kingdom of God, on its revolutionary power and on its (or God’s) great attack (großen Angriff) that in Jesus Christ has already been executed and accomplished. The break with the powers of this world, their destruction *de iure* has been accomplished, the victory is gained as the revolutionary power of God’s kingdom has already done the job! – *perfectum est*. But such realism (or “Positivismus”),272 which had dissatisfied Bonhoeffer, also failed to please Den Dulk who later observes in his evaluation that Barth has tempered - if not frustrated -

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265 Den Dulk, *Als twee die Spreken*, for the following see esp. 128ff.
266 See Den Dulk, *o.c.*, 128ff.
267 Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 93 (87); see Den Dulk, *o.c.*, 128.
268 *CD* IV/2, 543 (614); Den Dulk, *o.c.*, 128f.
269 Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 93 (87).
270 See Den Dulk, *o.c.*, 130, speaking of a ‘decisive change of direction’ by Barth (*beslissende koerscorrectie*).
271 Den Dulk, *o.c.*, 131: my translation of: “Barth wil veel duidelijker de maatschappelijke en politieke relevantie van het evangelie naar voren laten komen: de maatschappij omwentelende en veranderende kracht van het Rijk van God”.
Bonhoeffer’s proper passion to really give humans their own part in the messianic movement.\(^2\)\(^7\)\(^3\) But although similar frustration was felt by Den Dulk himself,\(^2\)\(^7\)\(^4\) he nevertheless comes with his final conclusion that Barth, by stressing the society-changing and revolutionary power of the kingdom, was making a move towards Liberation theology.\(^2\)\(^7\)\(^5\)

At this point, however, I find it hard to follow Den Dulk to the extent, namely, that liberation theology involves some form of “recognition and adoption of a program, ideal or law, or the attempt to fulfil it” which is precisely the kind of discipleship Barth rejected (CD IV/2, 536 (606f)). It is true that Barth laid so much emphasis on the revolutionary power of the kingdom but he did so in terms of his own realism. The difference with Bonhoeffer concerning the “break” is not to be found in their more or less liberating or revolutionary character, nor in the intended totality. For both men, the break is radically directed against the given powers, in their immediacy, in their functioning as human-made, god-like absolutes. What, in my view (fio) is crucial in the divergence between Bonhoeffer and Barth is that both localize the break – or rather the result of the break, its effect - at a different place.

Bonhoeffer places the break within actual human existence, namely, between the one who is called and the powers mentioned. Christ has made this break through the call to follow him and approach these powers only through Him, thus putting himself in between. In this way, Jesus Christ created room for ‘the one called’ in order that he or she could now consciously and autonomously relate to, resist and fight against the (no longer immediate) powers.\(^2\)\(^7\)\(^6\) With Jesus in the middle, the one called is now enabled to treat the surrounding world through the mediation of Christ. He or she is both summoned and enabled to exist and act for Christ’s sake, to live and love in his name.\(^2\)\(^7\)\(^7\) In other words, room is created for one’s own responsible action, through him and in the world. And one is called to enter this room actually and actively. Thus, for Bonhoeffer, within the existence of ordinary humans and Christians, there is still real and necessary work to be done.

Barth, however, locates the break entirely in the existence of Jesus Christ; or one can also say that he identifies the break with the existence of Christ. According to him, all the powers of Nothingness have been broken and conquered in the event of Christ, as through God’s own and absolute revolution. Justification and sanctification have taken place already in him; that is to say, de iure for all humankind, although actually only in Jesus Christ. The one who is called can only accept this as the supreme reality. He or she may point to it, correspond to it and give an attestation of the great break, as if all the inimical powers indeed have been defeated already. But those called have little to add to the break from themselves, nothing substantial, because the real work has already been done elsewhere and by someone else.

The call to discipleship concerns the external aspect of sanctification coming to us through the divine call. We now turn to the more internal aspect: the inner movement of conversion at which the call is aiming. This inner aspect is designated by Barth in

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273 Den Dulk, M., Als twee die Spreken, 136.
274 See below: Directio Christi, participatio Christi, and operatio Spiritus.
275 Den Dulk, M., Als twee die Spreken, 137.
276 Bonhoeffer, Discipleship, 95 (90): “Ever since Jesus called, there are no longer natural, historical, or experiential unmediated relationships for his disciples. Christ the mediator stands between son and father, between husband and wife, between individual and nation, whether they can recognize him or not. There is no way from us to others than the path through Christ, his word, and our following him. Immediacy is a delusion”.
277 Bonhoeffer, o.c., 95f (91): “For a disciple of Jesus, ‘God-given realities’ exist only through Jesus Christ. … Even the way to the ‘God-given reality’ of that other person, with whom I live, must go through Christ, or it is a wrong way. … The most loving sensitivity, the most thoughtful psychology, the most natural openness do not really reach the other person – there are no psychic immediacies. Christ stands between them. The way to one’s neighbour leads only through Christ”.
a section he called the awakening to conversion (CD IV/2, §66,4).

7.3.2.c. THE AWAKENING TO CONVERSION

Seen from the standpoint of the human subject, the relationship between the outer and inner aspect of sanctification largely coincides with the relationship between the divine and the human part in it. So far, it appears that Barth laid great emphasis on the (working-)part of God. And as the title of the present subsection already shows, human conversion too, is primarily approached from the perspective of its awakening, of its being aroused, caused and executed by divine intervention. The point to explore, now, is Barth’s theology of conversion, especially with respect to the divine-human division of roles, and the question regarding who the active S/subject in it is. It will appear to have a similar structure as that seen in his Christology. This similarity concerns the post Chalcedonian discussion on the divine and human nature, or rather hypostasis, of the God-man that became known as the an/enhypostasy doctrine. This doctrine can serve as a model for commensuration with the way the division of roles in our conversion is envisioned by Barth.278

Therefore, firstly and in advance, I will briefly describe Barth’s strong endorsement of this piece of early medieval theology on the an/enhypostatic being of Jesus Christ (i). Secondly, I will return to the proper subject of conversion and describe Barth’s elaboration of the awakening to conversion, especially concerning the question of the active S/subject (ii). More or less corresponding with the two subjects that are active in a Christian’s conversion, Barth also describes two movements that can be distinguished in the same process. This will be addressed thirdly (iii).

7.3.2.c.1 AN/ENHYPOSTATIC BEING OF JESUS CHRIST

In the context of his doctrine of sanctification (IV/2), Barth proved himself a strong supporter of the ontological-Christological teaching of an/enhypostasis to describe the being and humanity of the god-man Jesus Christ.279

The distinction was originally forwarded by so called Neo- or Cyrilline Chalcedonians in the aftermath of the Council of Chalcedon to defend posthumously the orthodoxy of their teacher Cyril of Alexandria who had died some years before the Council. To this aim, they tried to interpret Chalcedon “in the light of the Christology of St. Cyril”. Their defence was primarily directed against full blown Monophysites who claimed Cyril for their cause as well and argued that Chalcedon had betrayed Cyril (ODCC, 1143).280 The ground for this controversial appeal was that Cyril had taught “one incarnate nature of the Word” (1111). He had “used the Greek word φύσις” whereas the Council chose for hypostasis (‘person’). It is most likely, however, that Cyril had used “φύσις as almost if not quite the equivalent of ὑπόσσησις (‘person’), and not in its later sense of ‘nature’” (447). On these premises, the Cyrilline Chalcedonians could propose the theory of an/enhypostasis. Their intention was “to give fuller expression to the human side of Christ’s work” (549f). But for a balanced evaluation, consideration to be given

278 In a similar way, Van der Kooi, As in a mirror, 431 (380) identifies the an/enhypostasis theory as the conceptual form to illustrate Barth’s strict condition for true human knowledge of God.

279 See CD IV/2, 50: “The protest against the concept of anhypostasis or enhypostasis as such is without substance, since this concept is quite unavoidable ... to describe the mystery” of the God-man, Jesus Christ. In §64,2 The homecoming of the Son of Man (36-116 (38-128)), Barth repeatedly refers to this concept.

280 References in this intermezzo to: The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (ODCC), 1143 (lemma of “Neo-Chalcedonianism”). Other references to “Monophysitism” (1111f); “Cyril, St.” (446f); “Enhypostasism” (549f).
to the fact that they did so from an originally Alexandrian point of departure, that is, with a basically monophysite tendency.

The doctrine of an/enhypostasis teaches that “in the Incarnate Christ, though the humanity has no ‘person’ (hypostasis) of its own, it is not on that account ‘anhypostatic’ (deprived of a hypostasis), but finds its hypostasis in the hypostasis of the Logos”. Thus, while in theory the impersonalitas of the humanity of Jesus was acceded – implying that strictly speaking, there never existed a separate human individual with a self-subsisting human self, called Jesus - it was simultaneously assumed and believed that the theoretically ‘incomplete human’ Jesus received his full existence and his personal foundation, entirely in the Son of God, in the heavenly Logos, the second ‘persona’ in the Trinity. Approaching the very matter from the divine perspective, it can be said that what the Son of God assumed was, as Barth puts it, “not merely ‘a man’ but the humanum”. He did not unite, so to speak, with a homo, but with the humanitas that is common to all people. In fact, the divine Logos assumed “the being and essence, the nature and kind, which is that of all men which characterizes them all as men and distinguishes them from other creatures”. The result of this divine-human connection was that the personality of the God-man was provided for by the Logos or Son of God to such a degree that in the One Jesus Christ “there is no other subject apart from the Son of God”. Still, according to Barth, this must not be seen as any deification of the Son of Man, neither does he become, so to speak, a fourth figure in the Holy Trinity. But it does mean that He necessarily “acquires and takes as man the same full share in its being and work in creation as He has in its inward life as God. Godhead surrounds this man like a garment and fills Him as the train of Yahweh filled the temple in Isajas 6. This is the determination of His human essence”. In fact, Jesus Christ - as the Son of Man and as “the Son of God which He is also and primarily” has so powerfully, overwhelmingly and effectively been determined by His divine origin that this became “His absolutely effective determination” to the extent that “there is no other subject apart from the Son of God which can give even partially a different determination or character to human essence”.

The often-raised objection, also mentioned by Barth himself, is that the an/enhypostatic Christology involves “a denial of His true humanity, a concealed or even blatant Docetism”. This criticism, which is as easily suggested by Barth, as denied

281 See also: Van den Brink & Van der Kooi, Christelijke Dogmatiek, 374f., suggesting that the theory of enhypostasy served to counterbalance a suspected element of Nestorianism in the Chalcedonic solution. Thus, to evade any Nestorian idea of ‘two separate Persons in the Incarnate Christ’, it was emphasized at the Council of Constantinople, two years after Chalcedon, that “one of the holy Trinity, namely the divine Word, has become flesh” thus supplying the human nature with her personality.

282 ODCC, 549 (“Enhypostasia”); also 1143: the Neo- or Cyrillic Chalcedonians insisted “that the one hypostasis of the incarnate Christ is identical with the Second Person of the Trinity”.

283 CD IV/2, 48 (51); also: 59 (63v).

284 CD IV/2, 88 (96f).

285 CD IV/2, 94 (103).

286 CD IV/2, 94 (104), italics ffo.

287 CD IV/2, 92f (102).

288 CD IV/2, 88 (96f).
and dismissed,289 need not busy us as such.290 My main concern is about the divine-human relationship, not within Jesus Christ himself, but within the phenomenon of sanctification in ordinary humans, as accounted for by Barth. The an/enhypostasy doctrine can stand as a model for the division of the divine and the human role in conversion. To what extent is conversion really a human affair, consisting of human activity? And on the other side: to what degree is it a divine procedure supremely executed upon us, as human objects? When in the event of our own sanctification, too, there is no other subject apart from the Son of God – implying that Jesus Christ or God is the only active Subject to our sanctification – then the question of ‘Docetism’ concerning the reality of our own subjectivity, of the human part and potential, cannot be evaded.

7.3.2.c.II The Subject of Conversion

Christians are those who wake up from their ‘sleep’ because “they are awakened” from the “relentless downward movement consequent upon their sloth”.291 If this is to happen, a “new and direct act of God Himself” is required. Our awakening “cannot be initiated by ourselves” as it has its analogy only in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.292 Dealing with conversion as “this lifting up of ourselves”, therefore, is dealing with “the divine mystery and miracle of this lifting up of ourselves”.293 According to Barth, this does not at all exclude but fully includes human conditions and action. On the side of ordinary humans it involves the most intensive “conscription and cooperation … of his whole heart and soul and mind, which … includes his whole physical being”.294 Trying to combine both sides, Barth emphasizes that our awakening to conversion is wholly and utterly “creately by nature” while its jolt (Anstoβ) is “not the work of … creaturely factors”.295 Accordingly, our awakening and, as appears from the next quotation, the subsequent conversion as well are depicted as primarily the work

289 CD IV/2, 49 (53); citing Hollaz (Perfectio rei ex essentia, non ex subsistentia aestimanda est), Barth comments that “it is true enough that the humanum exists always in the form of actual men”, adding that “this existence is not denied to the man Jesus, but ascribed to Him with the positive concept of enhypostasis”.

290 See for such criticism: Waldrop, Karl Barth’s Christology: Its Basic Alexandrian Character; and the critical discussion of this work by Hunsinger, “Karl Barth’s Christology: its basic Chalcedonian Character”, in: Webster, 127-142. Waldrop fails to notice, according to Hunsinger, that Barth “employs a dialectical strategy of juxtaposition” (132), namely through alternating “between an ‘Alexandrian’ and an ‘Antiochian’ idiom” which, being in line with “the New Testament itself”, Hunsinger supposes to be “the proper way to be Chalcedonian in Christology” (130).

291 CD IV/2, 555 (627f).

292 CD IV/2, 556 (629); referring to John 5,24 and 1 John 3,14, Barth observes that we “have really passed (metabebèken) from death to life if we hear the Word of Jesus and believe in Him that sent Him and love the brethren”. It concerns a transition which “cannot be initiated by ourselves”. See also CD IV/2, 308 (343f), where the awakening of man to being a Christian is considered as possibly even greater a miracle than the resurrection on Easter-morning: “How is it that in spite of everything there can be such a thing as a ‘Christian’ subjectivity? … By what miraculous happening [then] do we live? Does not the raising of Lazarus pale before that of which we are ourselves the witnesses and theatre? Or the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ? Or His empty tomb?”. 293 CD IV/2, 553 (626).

294 CD IV/2, 556 (629)); see, however, CD IV/2, 528 (598): here, Barth’s praising the human side is much less generous, when stating that although man has to “rouse himself and pull himself together … and take and execute decisions”, this is “only the spiritual and physical form of a happening which does not originate in himself” (italics mine).

295 CD IV/2, 557 (630).
of the will and act of God who uses these (creaturely) factors and Himself makes them co-efficients and agencies for this purpose, setting them in motion as such in the meaning and direction which He has appointed. We are thus forced to say that this awakening is both wholly creaturely and wholly divine. Yet the initial shock comes from God. Thus, there can be no question of co-ordination between two comparable elements, but only of the absolute primacy of the divine over the creaturely. The creaturely is made serviceable to the divine … It is used by God as His organ or instrument. Its creatureliness is not impaired, but it is given by God a special function or character. Being qualified and claimed by God for co-operation, it co-operates in such a way that the whole is still an action which is specifically divine.296

In conversion, the creaturely or human element is allowed to facilitate the agenda of the divine. Wholly creaturely and wholly divine means in the eyes of Barth an absolute primacy of the divine without creatureliness being impaired. The balance of both aspects is neatly fashioned after the Christological structure of the ‘natures’ of the God-man. In Jesus Christ it was given to the human nature to serve the Son of God “as His organ, as the body of which He is the Head”.297 Similarly, one’s awakening is explained as one’s being enabled to act as the subservient organ or instrument of God. Certainly, there are two aspects: one divine, the other human. Under the absolute primacy of the divine, human awakening takes place “all at once” (ungeteilt), says Barth, and “not … on two different levels”.298 Rephrasing the latter specification as not separated, it is apparent that Chalcedonian distinctions and precisions almost spontaneously offer themselves to circumscribe the undivided unity of our awakening – having one meaning and one content – and simultaneously to uphold the supreme Subjectivity of the divine, being unremittingly in control. At this point, the comparison with the an/enhypostasis theory enters the game. Human activity as such and apart from divine intervention is, so to speak, an-hypostatic, having no significant substance, no personal foundation of its own. Human endeavour can only have real substance and true reality when it is en-hypostatically based in the divine, not only in its original awakening but in all its being and acting, from beginning to end.

According to Barth, the “belief in an awakening” of humans to conversion is essential to the Christian belief in God. It is “just as real as God, or Jesus is real”. The Christian Church counts on it “that there is such a thing as the awakening of man to conversion”.299 We believe in it, just as we “believe in god”. What is more, we count on the fact that “God Himself gives and creates and actualizes it”. It is far from obvious that we could actually see or experience examples of conversion taking place before our eyes. The Scriptures of both Testaments count on it, says Barth, even though the Bible does not show us many “converted men”.300 What we do meet in the Bible is humans that are

296 CD IV/2, 557 (630).
297 CD IV/2, 97 (107); what is meant is the so called “postestas officii”, granted to the one Jesus Christ, namely the power to serve and execute the acts of the divine. See also CD IV/2, 98 (108) where it is observed that the grace addressed to the man Jesus, or more precisely, to the human nature of Jesus Christ, is the power “to attest the divine authority, to serve and execute it, to be its indispensable organ”.
298 CD IV/2, 557 (630f)
299 CD IV/2; respectively 558 (631); 559 (632); 557f. (631).
300 CD IV/2; respectively 558 (631) and 562 (635f).
caught up in the movement of conversion. If conversion is not behind them, it is also not in the mists before them. They are at the very heart of the movement. They had moved away from God. And it is saying too much to claim that they have moved right back to God. But … they can no longer proceed without God. On the contrary: they are compelled to rise up and come to Him and are now in the process of doing so.301

It may be illuminating to furnish these rather abstract lines with the example of the prophet Jonah, fleeing away from God, arrested by the divinely directed powers of nature, swallowed by a great fish and thrown up again, back into his mission, thus bit by bit and more or less *nolens volens*, being awakened to it, and forced into the movement of conversion.

So far, the divine part in sanctification is given the upper, if not the sole hand by Barth, leaving little room for the human counterpart. The result is not so much improvement but alteration302 of that which we believe takes place. Meanwhile, Barth distinguishes two movements being part of the one conversion, of which the first is, again, primarily divine. Only the second movement seems to be something that we have to make ourselves. The first is explained by Barth as our turning on an axis (1), the second as “falling out with oneself”. (*Auseinandersetzung mit sich selbst*).

### 7.3.2.c.III. Two Movements Forming Conversion

The first movement that is part of conversion is described by Barth as turning on an axis (1). It is strictly speaking not our own movement:

> The difference between the life of the one who is engaged in conversion and that of others is not that the former moves itself, but that it has an axis on which to turn. It is properly this axis which makes this man a new man, giving him part in its own movement. But the axis which makes his life a movement in conversion is the reality … that God is for him and therefore that he is for God.303

The axis as the dynamic of the twofold “for” (God for him, he for God) has been caught very aptly, says Barth, in Calvin's short statement: *Nostri non sumus, sed Domini*. 304 If we follow its drive, we become new beings, not only in relationship with God, but with our fellow-humans as well,305 not only partial but as “the whole man”,306 that we are, not only in private, but with “a public responsibility”, 307 not just now and then, but in the “totality of our whole life-movement”.308

The driving force of the “axis” that includes us in its movement stems from

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301 *CD* IV/2, 560 (634).
302 *CD* IV/2, 560 (633).
303 *CD* IV/2, 560f (634).
304 *CD* IV/2, 561 (634f). The Calvin quotation is from *Inst.* III,7,1. In another place Calvin himself made use of the same notion, ‘axis’ (*cardo*), namely in *Inst.* III,11,1. Calvin, however, used the image not with respect to our sanctification but to illumine the central role of justification. In the first ten chapters of book III (Ch.1-10) he discussed sanctification in order make clear that faith, bestowed upon us by grace, is not without “good works”. Only in Ch. 11 Calvin turns his full attention to Justification. There, Calvin observes that Justification “*praecipuum esse sustinendae religionis cardinem*” (*Inst.*III,11,1).
305 *CD* IV/2, 563 (637).
306 *CD* IV/2, 564 (638).
307 *CD* IV/2, 565 (640).
308 *CD* IV/2, 566 (641).
Jesus Christ being the Head and we being his members. It “is in His conversion that we are engaged”. Its dynamic impetus is the “event … of Golgotha, in which He accomplished in our place and for us all the turning and transforming of the human situation … It is … in the light of this climax, that the awakening to repentance is the power of the Gospel …, and that it has the force and depth and teleology which … claims man in his totality” 309 But while the revealed truth of ‘God for humans and humans for God’ forcefully sets us in motion, 310 this must not be misunderstood in a magical, mechanical or automatic sense. We are no mere logs in a river carried relentlessly downstream, 311 although there certainly is compulsion. A human person, immersed in conversion

*must* pass from a well-known past to a future which is only just opening up … from himself as the old man to himself as a new man … There is necessarily compulsion. No question of a choice can enter in. … But the compulsion is not … abstract. It is not blind or deaf. … It is the compulsion of a permission and ability which have been granted. It is that of the free man who as such can only exercise his freedom. The omnipotence of God creates and effects in the man awakened to conversion a true ability. (…) In this freedom there has been taken from him once and for all any mere choosing or self-deciding. 312

The human role in sanctification, again, appears to be fashioned after the division of roles and natures in the God-man Jesus Christ. Framed in terms of the hypostasis philosophy, Barth’s description of conversion offers a striking picture of the *anhypostatic* nature, the *impersonalitas* of the human role in it, analogous to the role of humanity in Jesus Christ. In both cases humanity serves as the vehicle for the divine agenda. Just as the God-man did not proceed from his human self, having his one personal self entirely from above, 313 so the awakening to conversion of ordinary humans is entirely due to divine intervention and driving power. Any autonomous-human “choosing or self-deciding” is out of the question. And this concerns more than only the initial point of awakening.

In Barth’s presentation, human conversion appears from start to finish as a divine achievement. It begins as “a decision of God” for us. Then the “true ability” that is needed for the once awakened to go on is also made by the omnipotent God and bestowed upon us as Christian freedom. When it is indeed given, this freedom is like an offer you can’t refuse to put into action. Through His decision for our conversion, God enables us to make “a corresponding decision … for God”, namely as a “free act of … obedience”. What is more, God also takes measures of the kind that “makes this act and obedience real, directly causing it to take place”. 314 Analogous to the spiritual dynamics within the *unio personalis* of Jesus Christ, the divine serves as

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309 Cf. *CD IV/2*, 583 (659f).
310 *CD IV/2*, 563 (637).
311 *CD IV/2*, 578 (653f); see also *CD IV/1*, ??? (535), where Barth consents with the *Formula Concordiae* that the human being as related to justification can be compared to a *lapis et truncis* but adds that a human being always remains a human being (*so kann das doch nicht bedeuten, daß er verholzt oder versteinert und also kein Mensch, als Mensch nicht mehr da ware*).
312 *CD IV/2*, 578f. (654).
313 *CD IV/2*, 91 He is not of Himself. He derives entirely from His divine origin (100: *Er ist nicht an sich, er ist nur von seinem göttlichen Ursprung her*).
314 *CD IV/2*, 579 (655).
the “absolutely effective determination” with respect to the entire course of our conversion and sanctification. It is Divine action that irresistibly compels us to a “corresponding” reaction. This brings us to the second ‘movement’ of our conversion which is a movement in ourselves. I take along the still unanswered question, namely to what extent and on which point we – that is: we-ourselves - enter the picture as active, human (co-) subjects of our conversion.

Turning on an axis, we are brought into a kind of inner warfare which leads to a second movement (2), namely of “falling out with oneself” (Auseinandersetzung mit sich selbst). As hinted at earlier, Luther’s simul regarding our being iustus et peccator is to be applied to sanctification and, therefore, to conversion as well. This means that we are in fact two ‘selves’ at the same time: on the one hand, the old sinful self of yesterday that is wholly denied, and on the other, our new and holy self of tomorrow that is wholly affirmed. But this simultaneously being a sinner and a holy person, this twofold determination cannot remain:

Its whole will and movement and impulse is to fall out or to fall apart (strebt und drängt wesensmäßig a u s e i n a n d e r) … not dualistically in a division or re-stabilised co-existence of an old man and a new, a sinner and a saint, but monistically in the passing and death and definitive end and destruction of the one in favour of the …exclusive existence of the other. In the quarrel (Auseinandersetzung) in which man finds himself engaged in conversion … he has not fallen out with himself partially but totally (seine totale Auseinandersetzung mit sich selbst), in the sense … that he can no longer be the one he was and can be only the one he will be.

Thus Barth is taking up what the Reformers have designated as mortificatio and vivificatio. Reminiscent of the call to discipleship also involving “self-denial”, conversion entails the “falling out” with oneself (Auseinandersetzung) to the extent that my old self, the slothful self that I am of myself, must be killed or left behind uncompromisingly in order that I may join and be my new self, i.e., the one I am

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315 CD IV/2, 572 (646f).
316 CD IV/2, 573f. (648f).
317 CD IV/2, 574ff (649f), especially referring to Calvin.
318 See CD IV/2, 539. (610): in dialogue with Bonhoeffer, Barth had already radicalized Bonhoeffer’s rather innocent “first step” into nothing less than “the definite loosing of a man from himself”, which he supposed to be more than only “an inner withdrawal from oneself”. Instead, the call to discipleship must be “heard and taken seriously as a call to self-denial” (542 (614)), see 7.3.2.b, nt. 258.
319 The German word Aus-ein-ander-setzung must be taken literally, cf. CD IV/2, 570 (644f.): It’s a pity, says Barth, that there is no English or French equivalent for Auseinandersetzung. It appears that the word is meant in the literal sense of putting things apart: “We cannot wish to fall out with God (Mann kann sich mit Gott … nicht auseinandersetzen wollen,). We can only be glad … that God is on our side (sondern soll froh und dankbar sein dafür, daß Gott sich noch und noch mit unsereins zusammen-setzt”). Falling out (Auseinandersetzung) in the context of conversion therefore means that man is, so to speak, divorcing from his own old self, that is from his old, slothful self. According to Barth, there is every cause “to fall out with oneself (Es besteht aber aller Anlaß … sich mit sich selbst auseinanderzusetzen), because this ‘oneself’ is one’s old, slothful self, which has to be removed thoroughly. At this point, Den Dulk (Als twee die spreken, 81, 89) is too gentle when using softer interpretative notions as ‘inner dialogue’ (“dat het in de omkeer gaat om een gesprek, dat de mens met zichzelf voert”) and ‘critical distance’ (kritische distantie).
320 Taking into account the radical picture drawn by Barth himself, it is highly remarkable that he criticizes Calvin for a supposed “over-emphasing of mortificatio” and for giving too much priority to abnegatio
already in Jesus Christ: the one I may be and have to be. Getting rid of the old slothful person we are from below, we must become, so to speak, impersonal in order to accept a new personality and a new ability from above. This is our true self that is already realized in Jesus Christ. In front of us we have a new life, a new ‘person’ that lives as it were enhypostatically in Him, in whom the new potential of Christian freedom is there before us.

The question that haunts me from the start, and still is not yet clearly answered, is whether there is any role for humans as co-subjects in their own right. In what measure does this new potential in Christ really concern us in our actual existence? Does it really reach us?! This is far from evident in Barth’s presentation. Although we heard above that a human’s conversion is “a decision of God” which makes our act and obedience real, even “directly causing it to take place”, it finally turns out that all these statements do only in second instance concern us. With respect to all that has been said so far, Barth observed that it “referred directly to Jesus Christ, and only indirectly, as fulfilled and effectively realized in Him for us, to ourselves”. Basically, when we ask “of whom we have spoken continually as one who is engaged in conversion” then the answer is simply “that in the true sense it is He alone”.

This rather sobering conclusion affirms that, so far, Barth’s description of sanctification seems to evade or preclude the human role. Every time, when arriving at the point where the human subject should join in and engage him/herself in the movement of sanctification, Barth seems to start back. Nevertheless, according to Barth, and although feeble and frail, there are examples of conversion, repentance and starting anew on our part as well. There even are “works” which not only receive the praise of God but, in turn, praise Him as well, and therefore are to be designated as good works. With these ‘works’ we finally enter the human part and the question of the human subject. To what extent can we become co-subjects with respect to our sanctification? To what extent can we become co-creative? What is the human potential to contribute to the sanctification of your own life? Or in more general, not specifically religious terms: What can be your own role in the realization of your true human self? This will be our concern in the next section of this paragraph (§ 7.3.3 Participation by us). By way of transition, however, I will first discuss a peculiarity of Barth’s use of the notion participatio Christi, proposed by him as the essence of Calvin’s understanding of Sanctification.

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naturae nostrae / abnegatio nostrae as the first step to obedience (CD IV/2, 575 (650f.)). It appears to me that Barth’s underlying and probably real objection to Calvin is not the latter’s severity, but his treatment of ‘fear of God’, penitence, self-denial and equivalents in a way which is too autonomous in the eyes of Barth. Note Barth’s remark: “This brings us to the deep reason” (580 (656f)). Barth’s underlying motive here is that in his eyes, Calvin is arguing too independently from the knowledge of Christ. Penitence as such does not lead us to Christ, says Barth. It has to be the other way around.

321 Italics ffo, CD IV/2, 579 (655). (note 286)
322 CD IV/2, 583 (659); for Barth, the indirect relationship to us, with regard to the statements on sanctification, makes them not less valid for us, as he goes on, saying: «It is to be noted that they are indirectly and therefore genuinely, to be referred to us” (Jene Aussagen… sind indirekt, un gerade so echt und wahrhaftig auf unsereins zu beziehen).
323 CD IV/2, 582 (658).
324 CD IV/2, 584 (661); cf. the title of §66,5 The Praise of Works.
7.3.2.c.iv Intermezzo: Directio Christi, participatio Christi and operatio Spiritus: genitivi subjectivi

Although Calvin is praised and referred to many times, the differences between Barth and Calvin with regard to sanctification can be illustrated by comparing the following quotations.

Above we heard Barth stressing the simul character of all the aspects of salvation having taken place exclusively in the holy One:

*He is the one living Lord in whom all things have occurred, and do and will occur, for all.*

Within the context of Sanctification this exclusive in-Christ-realism seems to be far removed from Calvin, who states in the opening chapter of his doctrine of Sanctification that

*so long as we are without Christ and separated from him, nothing which he suffered and did for the salvation of the human race is of the least benefit to us. To communicate to us the blessings ... he must become ours and dwell in us ... [as] all which he possesses ... [is] nothing to us until we become one with him ...* 

According to Calvin, sanctification de iure is worth nothing if it is not communicated to us de facto. Therefore, while acknowledging the central role of faith, namely in Christ and his work, Calvin considered it necessary

*to ascend higher, and inquire into the secret efficacy of the Spirit, to which it is owing that we enjoy Christ and all his blessings.*

As was noticed already by Den Dulk, Barth seems a bit hesitant concerning the secrecy of the Spirit’s operation and substitutes it with the openness of the direction (*Weisung*) by Christ, the godly Word. Thus Barth, inconspicuously, re-interprets Calvin’s last observation, stating that

*the sanctification of man as the work of the Holy Spirit has to be described as the giving and receiving of direction.*

This bending away from the work of the Spirit (back) to the direction of the Son is all the more remarkable as the very matter had been handled by him more or less in the opposite direction earlier, namely in the more strictly Christological paragraph entitled *The Direction of the Son* (*§64,4 Die Weisung des Sohnes*). After the powerful picture of the Royal Man (*§64,3*), the question was raised by Barth regarding how “what He was and is and will be - can and must and will reach and affect us”. Vis-à-vis the picture of the Royal One, this was in fact the central question of Sanctification, namely “how we come to a …transforming realization of this enclosing and controlling of our anthropological sphere by the royal man Jesus”.

There (in *§64,4*) Barth’s first answer was that this transition is executed by the direction of the son. This direction is not just an imparting of distant knowledge of Him and correspondingly of ourselves as belonging to Him, but it appears to be a transforming power not unlike the converting dynamic of the ‘God for us and we for Him’ we met above. *Directio Christi* sets us in the “freedom to appropriate as our own conversion the conversion of man to God as it has taken place in Jesus Christ”*. Deriving from His resurrection, the working of

325 See quotation in the introduction of this paragraph 7.3.

326 Calvin, *Institutes*, 463 (III,1,1).

327 *Idem*.

328 Den Dulk, *Als twee die spreken*, 51; see intro 7.3.2)

329 *CD IV/2*, 523 (592).

330 *CD IV/2*, 265 (293f).

331 *CD IV/2*, 266 (295).

332 See 7.3.2.c (Two movements forming conversion: turning round an axis).

333 *Directio Christi* is my fabrication (fio); direction is the translation of: *Weisung*, see 7.3.2 Introduction.

334 *CD IV/2*, 304 (339f). This power is bringing about “the translation of man from a state of disobedience to one of obedience”, it is causing man to acknowledge and stick to the fact “that the alteration of the human situation which has taken place in Him is our own”.

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Directio Christi is further identified as being a “sovereignly operative power of revelation”335, demonstrating itself as the power of “the inconceivably transcendent transition from what is true and actual in Jesus Christ to what is true for us”.336 It is the power that accomplishes the miraculous fact that “in spite of everything there can be such a thing as a ‘Christian’ subjectivity”.337 Finally, this power of the Son’s direction and resurrection is equated and identified with the Holy Spirit, appearing to be “no other than the presence and action of Jesus Christ Himself: His stretched out arm; He Himself in the power of His resurrection”. Therefore, no Christian, says Barth, can be less than a “pneumatic”.338 Thus, in his paragraph on the Direction of the Son (§64,4) Barth seems to be moving step by step from the public and revealing existence of the royal man Jesus to the more mysterious or inner workings of its originating power; in other words, Barth appeared to be moving from Jesus Christ to the Holy Spirit. And the remarkable thing to be observed in his proper paragraph on Sanctification (§66) is that Barth then seems to be moving in quite the opposite direction by turning back from “the inconceivably transcendent” to what is known, from what is mysterious to what is revealed and public. This moving back happens especially in §66,2 in his dialogue with Calvin, in a way that already puzzled Den Dulk and, after reading him, puzzles me even more.

Apart from his doctrine of election which is strongly criticized, Calvin is treated and invoked by Barth as a theological companion. Calvin is praised especially with regard to the first chapter of the third Book of his Institutes, which carries the title: “The benefits of Christ made available to us by the secret operation of the Spirit”. Arcana Operatio Spiritus is the central and often recurring notion in Calvin’s understanding of Sanctification. Barth, however - as pointed out by Maarten den Dulk339 - never mentions the proper title (in which the secret operation of the Spirit is vital), but refers to it consequently as Calvin’s doctrine of participatio Christi.340 Apparently hesitant as regards the adjective ‘arcana’,341 Barth emphasizes instead the openness and common accessibility of what Christ has brought, even to the extent that for Christians it is only secondarily

a matter of their understanding and interpreting His existence and relevance. It is a matter of its self-interpretation as this is not now concealed from them but revealed to them. This is not without its effect on their existence. … It compels them at once to a re-interpretation of themselves … He, the Holy One, being revealed to them as such and not hidden, present as their living Lord … has placed them and their whole being and thinking and action and inaction … under His direction.342

It seems that Barth felt the urge to evade Calvin’s central notion of the secret operation of the Spirit. On the one hand, he does so by stressing – apparently even beyond the need of interpretation on our part - the open, unambiguous and public impact of the man Jesus Christ by

335 CD IV/2, 318 (356).
336 CD IV/2, 307 (342: „Die Kraft des unbegreiflich hohen Übergangs von dem, was in Jesus Christus wirklich und wahr zu dem, was für uns wahr ist, noch einfacher gesagt: von Christus zu uns als Christen“).
337 CD IV/2, 308 (343f). Compared to this miraculous happening – i.e., our transposition into de facto being a Christian and thus into the Christian freedom - Barth raises the question: “Does not the raising of Lazarus pale before that of which we are ourselves the witnesses and theatre?” (308 (344)).
338 Resp. CD IV/2, 322f. (361) and 321 (359)).
339 Den Dulk, M., Als twee die spreken, 51.
340 Cf. among others CD IV/2, 511 (578); 522 (591); 581 (658).
341 Cf. Den Dulk, o.c., 51; in stead of being ‘arcana’, no less than three times on one page – says Den Dulk - does Barth stress the Holy One and his impact as “revealed to them as such and not hidden” (nicht verborgen sondern offenbar), cf. CD IV/2, 521f (590)
342 CD IV/2, 521f (590).
means of his direction: directio Christi. Thus, he seems to be withdrawing himself again, from the Spirit, i.e., from what he himself had designated earlier (sc. in §64.4) as the more mysterious side.\textsuperscript{343} On the other hand, while tacitly evading all mention of the secret (arcana) operation of the Spirit, Barth labels Calvin’s understanding of sanctification differently by presenting it continually as participatio Christi. The question is: why? And to what effect?

To answer these questions, there are two possible options, of which one was suggested by Den Dulk. He argues that Barth – in order to interpret Calvin - chooses participatio Christi to emphasize the reformer’s central motive, being our “existential engagement” in Christ. Sanctification, according to Calvin, is about us enjoying and partaking in Christ and in his sanctity (Teilnahme).\textsuperscript{344} At first sight, this appears as the obvious and only probable option, namely, in which participatio Christi is taken – linguistically - as a genitivus objectivus, Christ being the object of us taking part in him. Indeed, our participation in Christ seems to be the intended result when the benefits of Christ become available to us. There is, however, something very ambiguous in the way Barth seems to be ‘framing’ Calvin’s perspective as participatio Christi. To put it bluntly, participation Christi in the hands of Barth seems to change color from a genitivus objectivus into subjectivus, on a par with direction Christi (or Weisung des Sohnes) and Operatio Spiritus. Since it is not easy to catch, I will try to exemplify my point.

Firstly, commenting on the close connection between Justification and Sanctification (cf. the closing lines of §66.1), Barth states that

\textit{the basic act in which they are a whole ... is as Calvin sees it ... the participatio Christi given to man by the Holy Spirit.}\textsuperscript{345} The equalization of the “basic act” with participatio Christi is curious when we realize what in the eyes of Barth is “the basic act”, namely the one event in Jesus Christ that is underlying, binding together, even including both justification and sanctification. For Calvin, as we have seen above, the basic act, the axis or cardo of the Christian faith was justification, being “the principal ground on which religion must be supported”.\textsuperscript{346} Now, it is obvious, indeed, that for Calvin our justification and sanctification come together and become effective and real only when we participate in Christ which supports the seemingly obvious interpretation, given by Den Dulk. However, I have a strong feeling, also nourished from the direct context,\textsuperscript{347} that Barth himself, in the short statement I have cited, has implicitly turned the notion of participation upside down. The reason is this: when for Barth the “basic act” in the cited statement does indeed (and even exclusively) refer to God and His unsurpassable gift: the existence of Jesus Christ, then the statement contains the remarkable identification of, on the one hand, what God has done and given in Christ with, on the other hand participatio Christi. In this way,

\textsuperscript{343} See above, my reference to CD IV/2, 307 (342): “the power of the inconceivably transcendent transition”.

\textsuperscript{344} Den Dulk, o.c., 51; Calvin considers it necessary “de arcana Spiritus efficacia inquirere, qua fit ut Christo bonisque eius omnibus fraamur (Inst. III,1,1). Furthermore, says Calvin, just as we find our perfect salvation in Christ, so, he baptizes us ‘with the Holy Spirit and with fire’ ut fiamus eius participes (Inst. III,1,4). Den Dulk also makes clear that the notion of ‘participation’ (Teilnahme) is a central keyword for Barth as well (Den Dulk, 52f).

\textsuperscript{345} CD IV/2, 511 (578): „Der Grundakt ... in welchem sie ein Ganzes sind ... heißt bei Calvin (im ersten Kapitel des dritten Buches beschrieben) die dem Menschen durch den Heiligen Geist geschenkte participatio Christi”).

\textsuperscript{346} Inst.III,1,1 (translation by Henry Beveridge): justification “praecipuum esse sustinendae religionis cardinem”; see above 7.3.2.c (Two movements forming conversion).

\textsuperscript{347} CD IV/2, 510f (578): Barth wonders why Calvin could be so free to give precedence alternatingly to either sanctification or justification. Barth then answers: “Because he started at the place which is superior to both because it embraces both” (italics mine). In my view, with this superior place Barth can only have had in mind the one and all underlying Christ event which for him (Barth) is the ‘basic act’.

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although attributed to Calvin, *participatio Christi* is actually changed by Barth, without notice and furtively, into a *genitivus subjectivus*. *Participatio Christi* now means Christ intervening, directing, taking part in *our* lives, rather than we, taking part in Him and *His* gifts. Not we, but God or Christ is the acting subject of taking part.

A second example further confirms my point. Criticizing Calvin’s restrictive doctrine of divine predestination for not recognizing the Gospel’s universal intention and relevance, Barth captures his point as follows:

*Thus the participatio or communicatio Christi, and the justification and sanctification of man grounded in it, is a divine action which has only particular significance*.

Firstly, when *participatio Christi* must be taken here in the regular sense as *genitivus objectivus* (humans taking part in Christ), then it is against the very crux of his own theology for Barth to go on implying that “justification and sanctification of man [are] grounded in it”. Secondly, a highly remarkable point cannot be overlooked: that *communicatio* and *participatio Christi* are presented by Barth as *divine* acts. Clearly, the suggestion here is that, like God is the Subject of predestination, so is He the active Subject (not the object) of *participatio* and *communicatio Christi*.

Finally, I add a third and last example. Looking back on his description of the awakening to conversion, Barth comments:

*We have merely taken seriously what Calvin called the participatio Christi, making it the ultimate foundation of his whole doctrine of sanctification. The actual event which is an event of revelation in virtue of the enlightening work of the Holy Spirit, and as such sets in motion the conversion of man, is the Christ-event.*

Now, it cannot be doubted that, according to Calvin, *participatio Christi* – in the regular sense as our “taking part in the benefits of Christ” - is the effectuation and elaboration of sanctification, its aim and goal and even material content. But our participation is certainly *not* its foundation (which is justification, see above). Barth, however, is diverging from Calvin in two ways. Firstly, he identifies Calvin’s *participatio Christi* as the ultimate foundation. Secondly, Barth identifies the foundation of sanctification (or conversion) as the divine basic act which is the “Christ-event”. This, however, is not Calvin’s but rather his own perspective. Thus, starting in one sentence with *participatio Christi* as the supposed foundation of sanctification after Calvin, he identifies this in the next with his own foundation which is the Christ-event. The remarkable outcome of this Barthian identification is that our participation or taking part in Christ is surreptitiously equated with God’s ‘taking part through Jesus Christ in us, in our life and our existence’. To the extent that this observation is correct, the conclusion must be that in a strangely furtive way, whether deliberately or inadvertently, Barth is actually steering away from participation by ordinary men and women. If so then Barth’s recommending of *participatio Christi* does not serve to emphasize our “existential engagement” as Den Dulk suggested but rather to defocus it. Remarkable as it may be, this is in line with Barth’s doctrine of sanctification we have explored so far. Barth seems to be less interested in the human part than the reformer is. Barth’s main interest is not our active and creative engagement but rather concerns the “unassailable objectivity” of God partaking and intervening in our life, epitomized in one main instance:

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348 CD IV/2, 520 (588: „Infolgedessen is auch die participatio oder communucatio Christi eine göttliche Aktion von bloß partikularer Bedeutung“).
349 CD IV/2, 581f. (658: „Wir haben nur mit dem Ernst gemacht, was eben Calvin die participatio Christi genannt und seiner Lehre von der Heiligung zugrunde gelegt hat. Das Tatgeschehen, das kraft des erleuchtenden Werkes des Heiligen Geistes auch Offenbarungsgeschehen ist und als solches des Menschen Umkehr in Bewegung setzt, ist das Christusgeschehen“).
350 CD IV/2, 581 (657).
Jesus Christ is the climax, the superior place, where it is properly and primarily and comprehensively real, where it originally takes place, that God (vere deus) is for man, and man (vere homo) is for God. If conversion of man is the movement which is initiated and maintained from the point where this is primarily and comprehensively real, this is only to say that it has its basis and origin in this climax, Jesus Christ.351

Our own ‘becoming active for God and his case’ is already supplied for in Christ. I consider it, therefore, far from obvious that Barth skipped arcana operatio Spiritus and chose for the designation participatio Christi in order to enlarge the individual believer’s engagement. Time and again, we have seen that Barth is particularly reluctant and critical about what may happen when humans become active and confident to play a contributing role.352 Anyhow, there can never be any “existential engagement” of faith whatsoever without at least some actual activity by ordinary human subjects. Therefore, I will now turn to Barth’s understanding of the works done by men and women, critically asking to what extent they are really regarded as the active subjects of these “works”. What actually is it that can be done by ordinary men and women themselves?

7.3.3 Participation by us

So far, Barth’s description of sanctification seems to evade the human role. At every turn, when arriving at the point where the human subject should really engage him/her self in the job, Barth seems to start back. After self-denial, ausinandersetzung and turning away from one’s self, active participation by ordinary human selves is far from self-evident since the true humanity in which one would expect them to participate is largely limited to Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, there are examples of human participation, firstly the more active participation leading to so called ‘good’ works (7.3.3.a The praise of Works). Secondly, human participation can take on a more passive form as in suffering (7.3.3.b The dignity of the Cross).

7.3.3.a Works of Praise

It is obligatory, says Barth, that Christians, that those who are sanctified in the Holy One, (called and awakened by Him, engaged in conversion) should do good works.

351 CD IV/2, 582 (658).
352 Notwithstanding his suggestion to the opposite (suggesting that Barth wanted to promote “existential engagement”), it is evident that Den Dulk was far from happy with Barth’s often displayed hesitation. In Als twee die spreken, Den Dulk observes more than once (and sometimes to the extent of a complaint) that Barth was so reluctant to give humans an active role, see Den Dulk, 59f, 91 (“Te schrille tonen?”). He observes that there is a ‘plus’ on the side of Calvin that is left unused by Barth (92), even to the extent of emotional emptiness on the side of Barth (“emotionele leegte … de suggestie, dat de mens er niet van zichzelf uit vanuit eigen ervaring en eigen situatie, bij kan zijn”). As regards Barth’s reading Bonhoeffer, Den Dulk commented that Barth had cooled down Bonhoeffer’s commitment to participate genuinely and fully as a human being in the messianic movement. Den Dulk even speaks of a “frustrating reservation” on the side of Barth (136). Illustrations of Den Dulk’s barely suppressed dissatisfaction are plenty, see 93 (onbehagen); 144 (iets onbevredigends); 149 (enigszins abstract); 162 (where he designates Barth’s minimizing the human initiative as unfortunate (“Het is inderdaad bepaald niet gelukkig wat Barth zegt”)); 162 (it led to misunderstanding even with a Barthian friend as U.Hedinger); 164 (en weer laaien de misverstanden op). Nevertheless, Den Dulk keeps interpreting Barth in meliorem partem, seemingly against his better intuition which, apparently, he felt prohibited to follow. He even goes as far as typifying Calvin as the more critical, Barth as the more positive of the two (Den Dulk, 166f), which is beyond my comprehension. The backbone of his remaining friendliness towards Barth’s perspective on Sanctification-conversion is Den Dulk’s interpretation of the culmination of conversion in die Ausinandersetzung mit sich selbst (falling out with one self) which he takes – in my view too uncritically - as a much too harmless and non-committal inner dialogue of a human being with him or herself (Den Dulk, 167; 81, 89).
Only then can we speak of a “real alteration of the human situation”. Otherwise all that has been said on reconciliation and sanctification would be quite futile.\textsuperscript{353} So, the question regarding the good works of the Christian is a special form of the question of sanctification. The Scripture not only reckons with sinners and bad works, but “blatantly counts on the existence of good works” as well.\textsuperscript{354} Therefore, after having dealt with the evil works in his previous paragraph (§65 \textit{The sloth and misery of man}), Barth will now concern himself with “the fact that there are also good works – good because they are praised by God and done to His praise”.\textsuperscript{355} In the paragraph on sin and misery, the human being has been considered by Barth as fully accountable for his/her evil work. In fact, as its acting subject, we should be fully ashamed of our sin which - vis-à-vis the royal One – was identified as our sloth. Presently, the question is whether a human being is held accountable for his/her \textit{good} work as well, and to what extent. In other words, who actually, according to Barth, is the acting subject of the works that are good and therefore praiseworthy? In order to delineate Barth’s position, I will look at his criteria defining good works (i). Next, I will discuss the question: what is the actual contribution and role of the man or woman who is involved in doing them? (ii).

\textbf{7.3.3.a Criteria}

Concerning the criteria for what is a good work (i) Barth observes that such a work can only occur within the “context” of the work or works of God since primarily “it is God who is at work”.\textsuperscript{356} Good works always stand “in relation to this good work of God”.\textsuperscript{357} Works can be good to the extent that they “declare what God has done in His good work”,\textsuperscript{358} to the extent that they take place “in its service” and “as its witnesses”.\textsuperscript{359} Good works are determined by the fact that “they are done as ordered and commanded by God”.\textsuperscript{360} Now, as all this may seem rather self-evident, Barth goes on transferring more emphasis on the side of God when stating “that it is the good work of God which alone makes possible the good works of man”.\textsuperscript{361} Referring to \textit{Corinthians} (I Cor.15,58), where Paul summons the faithful always to abound in “the work of the Lord”, Barth comments that there is “no question of any work of their own, but only of what the ‘εργον τού κυριου’ may do concerning them”.\textsuperscript{362} Good works must have the divine work as their “basis and source”\textsuperscript{363} as they can only be done in service of the work of God. Whether this actually and really does occur is not at all self-evident, since we are all sinners and even the best man or woman “cannot place himself … in the service of the work of God”. Still, as the occurrence of good works shows, the rule of sin can be broken, that is to say, not by ourselves but from above.

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{353} CD IV/2, 585 (662).
\bibitem{354} CD IV/2, 587 (664).
\bibitem{355} CD IV/2, 586 (663).
\bibitem{356} CD IV/2, 587 (664).
\bibitem{357} CD IV/2, 589 (666).
\bibitem{358} CD IV/2, 590 (667).
\bibitem{359} CD IV/2, 592 (669, 670).
\bibitem{360} CD IV/2, 595 (673).
\bibitem{361} CD IV/2, 591 (669).
\bibitem{362} CD IV/2, 590 (667).
\bibitem{363} CD IV/2, 590 (668).
\end{thebibliography}
When this takes place, it is obviously because God’s own work assumes a special form. This work itself … takes place in a very special way to particular men, declaring and indicating and attesting and making itself known to them, and in so doing impressing them into its service … The work of God which has taken place for them as for all men also takes place in them … with the result that as the men they are they have a share in it – only as its witnesses, but as such a real share.\textsuperscript{364}

The human role is to be available. There seems to be no need nor potential to take any initiative of our own but wait till God’s work itself is enforced, enforces itself upon us, thereby impressing us into its service, so that we become witnesses. Not our work, but the ‘work of God’ is in charge and we must keep ourselves at its disposal. This leads us to the second aspect of the role of the man or woman involved. Of what actual importance is the individual person, the human actor? Is there a so called inner human potential that also plays a role in one’s bringing forth good works?

\subsection*{7.3.3.a.ii \textbf{Human contribution}}

Regarding the question of the human contribution, and thus, the role of the acting person that is involved, Barth observes that one’s “inner quality … is not decisive” in producing good works.\textsuperscript{365} With their good works, humans are simply declaring, giving witness of the goodness of God, but they do so “not … with a capacity that they have brought” because the goodness of their works “comes down from above into the human depths”.\textsuperscript{366} Those that are involved in good works are no less sinners then the rest, which counts for their works as well. The only difference is that their works are induced by their sanctification in and through the Holy One, by their being called, awakened and engaged in conversion. Even so,

their works are taken into service by God and are good works, quite irrespective of what they might be apart from this relationship in the eyes of men and above all in the eyes of God, and quite irrespective of the fact that even as good works they are full of transgression. What these men do … is well done.\textsuperscript{367}

In civil society, or even in the eyes of God, certain human works may be full of transgression, may be wrong or ill directed; still, these works may equally well be elected, qualified and declared by God as good works. In fact, Barth is now abandoning the model of, what I call, enhypostatic transformation, replacing it by a procedure of forensic imputation.

The works of Jesus Christ can serve to exemplify the former model. Actually, His whole life can be seen as determined by enhypostatic transformation. His works are good, but not “irrespective” of their godly origin and quality. Rather, they are intrinsically good works since they proceed directly from their doer’s divinity. They are determined, transformed and qualified on account of their doer’s ‘personal’ foundation in the divine Word (enhypostasy). In a strongly

\begin{footnotes}
\item[364] CD IV/2, 592 (669f).
\item[365] CD IV/2, 589 (666); Barth concludes that “even a sinful man in his sinful work – and we are all sinners and all our works are sinful – may declare the good work of God, and therefore, even as a sinner and in the course of sinning, do a good work”.
\item[366] CD IV/2, 590 (667).
\item[367] CD IV/2, 593 (670).
\end{footnotes}
different way, however, the good works of ordinary humans, as Barth seems to suggest, derive their “goodness” not from an inherent quality within ourselves, neither from an inspiring quality stemming from God which we then try to imitate and realize, but from a higher, divine valuation or, rather, decision. They are declared good by a godly judgment “quite irrespective” of their content. The goodness of these works is due to ‘forensic imputation’ from above.

A biblical example may serve to illustrate what Barth’s elaborations might imply in the exceptional case of Samson. Although Samson (‘Sunny’) may have been the Judge with the most innocent name of all, he was in fact a bruiser and a brute, a rough and a sinner, a womanizer and a man of angry violence. He was a victim of treachery no less than he himself betrayed his divine secret in the mellow arms of his favourite prostitute. Last, but not least, he is probably the first known, religiously inspired, suicide-terrorist in history (at least in the eyes of the Philistines). Nevertheless, Samson was elected, sanctified, and declared a saint and servant of God even before he was born, as the angel had announced to his mother: “for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death” (Judges 13,7). Clearly, the works of our Old Testament superman are not good or holy in themselves nor are they thus in the eyes of God. Moreover, they are not changed by God nor transformed, only declared holy since, apparently, He could use them in His all-encompassing plan with Israel. Therefore, whatever Samson does is well done, good work. It may further be asked: who actually is the acting subject of Samson’s holiness? All ‘his’ good works, the works of praise that emerged so abundantly from his vibrant life can hardly be considered as really his works. Taken over by the unfathomable Ruach Adonaj, acting as a kind of detonator (Jgs.15,14f). Samson may as well be regarded as the victim of himself, the plaything of his own primitive passions, dragged about from failure to mis-achievement. But God is also not a suitable candidate for the acting agency as He, nowhere, seems to be withholding or transforming Samson’s rather blind behaviour. God seems to be merely following, accepting all the rages of His beloved little savage, rendering to Samson’s actions a positive interpretation and valuation, not based on their inner quality but by decision: holiness not forged through spiritual transformation, but declared holy by forensic imputation.368

Even while Samson is an exceptional case, Barth appears to have no great confidence in the human potential for creating or doing a good work on our own accord. Instead, the active side of our participation is to keep ourselves available and act when a good work passes by. I will now turn to the more passive aspect of human participation, namely human suffering which, according to Barth, is the last but certainly not the least part of Sanctification.

7.3.3.b. The Dignity of the Cross

The ultimate element in Barth’s doctrine of sanctification is the “cross” symbolizing human suffering. It is left to the last, firstly, because “in the cross laid upon the Christian, we really have to do with the fulfilment of his sanctification”.369 Moreover, the cross and the resurrection form the point at which the event of Jesus Christ points beyond itself to the second coming, to the final fulfilment of eternal life

368 See also CD IV/1, --- (123f): Synergy, partnership, co-responsibility of humans with God are presented as phenomena that entirely belong to the sphere of promise and hope. In eternal life, in his Kingdom we shall really serve, as the angels do (KD IV/1, 122; 124). Genuine divine-human cooperation is the content of the divine promise. Both in this life and in future life (in Diesseits wie im Jenseits) really serving God is future being (künftiges Sein). What the heresy of synergism (Synergismus) ascribes to us in the present, namely that we are (to be) co-workers with God in the process of reconciliation, must - according to Barth - be taken as the content of a promise, which is given and can never be stated as a fact (Postulat) (KD IV/1, 124f), to be fulfilled in eternity.

369 CD IV/2, 607 (686).
to which believers are moving together with the whole cosmos. Thus, secondly, “it is with reference to the cross that man’s sanctification is seen to be his movement to that goal”. (italics ffo) Barth seems to suggest that more than with the other aspects of sanctification – participatio Christi, discipleship, conversion, and the praise of works – it is particularly in carrying the burden of a cross that we are genuinely involved as ourselves, as human subjects, in a movement that is ours.370

Just like those who are sanctified should inevitably do good works, it is no less obligatory that Christians must bear their share of the cross that is ordained to them. In fact, this brings them in the closest relationship to the cross of Jesus Christ Himself, the cross being “the most concrete form of the fellowship between Christ and the Christian”. Barth emphasizes, however, that this is “not a direct but only an indirect connection”.371 Christians may follow Him, but this is “not … in an equality of their cross with His”. The mystical notion of an identification of theirs with the cross of Christ, to the extent that His cross becomes real and significant only as they take up theirs, is explicitly dismissed.372 The point of distinction is, firstly, that He suffered and carried His cross for others, which they do not; secondly, His cross included God’s rejection, actually being “their rejection”, which they have not endured but He has. So, the relationship between the two crosses is “irreversible”, theirs taking place “in correspondence” to His but “not in any sense in likeness, let alone identity”. In fact, saying that a Christian does really take part in the self-offering of Christ is saying too much. It can only be said in so far as they receive it in faith as done for them.373

Then, turning from this delimitation to the “positive” statement which must be made in this context, Barth explains that while being set in this movement in and through Christ

it is integral to the event of sanctification – the participatio Christi, the call to discipleship, the awakening to conversion and the praise of good works – that as the life-movement of the Christian – as a human, earthly-historical life-movement - it is radically and relentlessly fixed and held and broken at a specific place. In the literal sense it is a happening which is crossed through374

370 CD IV/2, 598 (677: the present aspect of sanctification belongs here as the last but not the least element “weil des Menschen Heiligung … eben von da, vom Kreuz her, als die menschliche Bewegung jenem Ziel entgegen sichtbar gemacht … wird”).
371 CD IV/2, 599 (677, 678).
372 CD IV/2, 599f (678).
373 CD IV/2, 600 (678f); see also 600f. (679) where Barth comments on Pauline texts. Paul’s saying in Gal. 2,20 (that he no longer lives, but Christ lives in him) must not be taken as an identification, nor that Paul considered himself to be a “second Christ”. Paul only wanted to express, says Barth, that, living in the flesh as a Christian, is living “by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me”. And other Pauline sayings, supposedly hinting at some kind of suffering with Christ (Gal. 2,19; 2 Cor.4,10; Gal. 6,14; Rom. 6,6; Gal. 5,24; Col. 3,5) “completely exclude any idea of an interchangeability of Christ and the Christian …Their cross corresponds (Entsprechung) to the death of Christ. It does this with supreme realism. But it does not do more. It is not a repetition or re-presentation of the cross of Christ”. Special care is taken by Barth to explain away the “obscure” tendency of Col.1,24, with its suggestion that Paul suffered ụpér others. Even in this outstanding passage, Barth concludes that “the connection between the suffering of the Christian and that of Christ is only indirect”.
374 CD IV/2, 601f. (680).
Actually, this is a recapitulation of what we have met earlier as the critical side of sanctification (7.3.2.a Disturbance and limitation). Accordingly, the cross of a Christian is serviceable to his sanctification, firstly, to the extent that it keeps him in proper humility as even an ordinary toothache keeps him aware of “the limited nature of even his Christian existence”.375 Secondly, it gives his conversion the fresh impulse and seriousness that it so badly needs and, finally, it disciplines and empowers his faith and obedience and love,376 testing, purifying and deepening his Christian existence and intensifying his Christian work.377 All these benefits of appropriate suffering may come to Christians in the actual form of persecution by the world, as a Christian remains in all times a bit of a strange-fellow, a “rara avis”.378 They may also come in the form of pain and suffering in connection with creation as a whole, which is suffering in fellowship with Him as well, manifesting “the supreme dignity of the Christian”.379 Finally, and even more supremely, Christians may have to bear the suffering of “practical doubt”, being the “bitterest form of the cross” which even Jesus himself has endured. This Christian doubt or despair is the sharpest form, says Barth, in which “a limit is set to the Christian”.380 Below I will return to this particular form of cross bearing.

More in general, it can be said that the Christian, being simul sanctus et peccator, is confronted in sanctification with a twofold limitation. On two levels he is faced with the curtailment of himself, namely as a sinner in his sin381 and as a Christian in his sanctity. Apparently, as sanctification starts with (disturbance and) limitation of sinners, so it ends with limitation of saints, of which the latter takes place when they bear their share of suffering. This leads to the paradoxical outcome that the cross signifies the “fulfilment” of one’s sanctification, namely through imposing a limitation to one’s being a Christian. The epitome of sanctity, apparently, is something like ‘spiritual humility’, ‘modesty’ or simply doubt.382

So far, we have met human suffering in three different categories, of which the cross laid upon a Christian is the third. The other two forms were suffering belonging to the shadow side of life (the first) and suffering stemming from Nothingness (the second). The question is how these different sorts of suffering are related to one another. Above (7.2º was noted that phenomena like illness or even death as belonging to the first category are to be considered as integral aspects of the good creation. They can be used by God, not to the destruction of someone but, to his or her salvation. It appeared,

375 CD IV/2, 607 (687).
376 CD IV/2, 608 (687f).
377 CD IV/2, 609 (689).
378 CD IV/2, 610 (690).
379 CD IV/2, 611 (691f), reference is made to Rom. 8, 19f.
380 Italics mine, CD IV/2, 612 (692f, „Sie ist die schärfste Gestalt, in der dem Christen seine Grenze gesetzt wird“); Barth refers to Jesus’ word in Mk 15,34 when he was crucified: Why hast thou forsaken me?.
381 See 7.3.2.a. Disturbance and limitation: the first aspect of sanctification was, according to Barth, its critical impact on ordinary humans. Being disturbed, the simultaneous incision executed by the direction of Christ was that “a limit is set to their being sinners” (italics mine, CD IV/2, 525 (594)). With the experience of the cross, however, a limit is set to their being a Christian.
382 CD IV/2, 607 (686); the cross, i.e. phenomena of suffering can be “serviceable to sanctification, to be kept in the humility which is not natural to any of us".
however, that these very same phenomena can also belong to the second category. If seen as coming from Nothingness, they are to be regarded as self-deserved sanctions inflicted on the sinner. As such, these phenomena of Nothingness are permitted and also used by God, namely as instruments of his righteous wrath and judgment.

Now, just as we have to accept the ‘shadows’ and the ‘penalties’, we have to accept the phenomena of the cross, because Sanctification of a Christian in all its forms and stages ultimately includes the fact that he has to see and feel and experience the limit of his existence – even of his Christian existence engaged in sanctification – as the limit of his human and creaturely life, which necessarily leads to pain and suffering and death. … As a Christian … he will accept the fact that this limit or frontier is set … He will take up his cross. “Whether we die, we die unto the Lord”. It is Christ who sets this term to our life. It is not merely a mark of our finitude. To be sure, natural death also belongs to the cross which the Christian has to take up. But this limit is not set according to a law of nature which the Christian has in common with all other men. It is set in his special fellowship with Jesus Christ … who is also Lord over nature and that which takes place according to its laws.383

Obviously, the sufferings of the second sort (of Nothingness) are not being envisioned here, while those of the shadow side of creational life (1st category) and the sufferings of the cross that is meted out to us by Christ (3rd category) are pictured as largely coextensive. The first type of suffering seems to be underpinned – we can also say reinterpreted - by the third. This strikes me as a remarkable drawing together of suffering for Christ’s sake, with natural suffering belonging to creation.384 At the same time, what Barth is implying is a faithful Christ-oriented form of acceptance of both sunshine and shadow, of life and death. The Christian, says Barth, “even knows better than others … what he is doing when he says Yes to the negation of his life, to pain and suffering and death”. A Christian will take it as it comes and because it is a matter of life, he will not negate but affirm it, just as elsewhere and right up to this frontier he will not negate but affirm life. He will not affirm either for their own sake. But he will definitely affirm both, even death, ἔνεκεν ἐμου, for Jesus’s sake. He will accept the fact that this limit or frontier is set … He will take up his cross.385

The affinity with the via negativa of Matthew Fox is striking, although there is a clear theological distinction as well. For Fox, the via negativa means accepting and even “befriending the darkness”, that is, accepting the shadow side of life for the sake

383 CD IV/2, 602f (681f).
384 I (ffo) find this highly remarkable as, in this way, what is a natural limitation of all (good) creation in the first sense is doubly explained, namely in Christian religious terms as stemming from Christ. Thus, the suggestion is made that e.g., a Christian’s natural death is not just set according to the common law of all nature but is at a deeper level envisioned as part of the Christian’s cross, meted out to him/her by Christ. Thus, what is natural in one sense, seems to be set by Christ as well; Christ who is also Lord over nature and over that which takes place according to its laws. Putting Christ thus in line with, or even making Him responsible for, the regular course of nature isn’t a thing I would expect to learn from Barth. The point is that in Barth’s presentation Christ can, indeed, be recognized as “lord over nature”; but seemingly with equal plausibility, he can be taken as Lord - or should we say, as exponent - of nature; and this can hardly be what Barth is aiming at.
385 CD IV/2, 602 (681); 603 (681f).
of creation itself of which it is a natural element. According to Barth, affirming and accepting the dark sides of life and even death is a matter of accepting your cross, not just for the sake of creation but, for Christ’s sake. What is basically positive with Fox, is a ‘cross’ with Barth.

Clearly, there is a certain overlap of the sufferings in light of the cross with those that belong to the shadow side of all life. But what is the difference? What interests me is whether (apart from overlap) there is an extra phenomenon as well: an experience of the cross that is not just a Christian reinterpretation of a natural happening but which, as an experience of the cross of Jesus, is really a different phenomenon. Thus, the question is whether there can be something that is specifically an incident of the cross. Can we conceive of phenomena that can only be experienced by Christians, phenomena with the special role of adding to their sanctification? The answer is that Barth reckons with both ‘special’ phenomena for Christians only and with a difference in ‘acceptance’ or interpretation of the same phenomena.

The latter can be illustrated by the example given by Barth of an ordinary toothache. Apart from being a limiting hindrance to non-Christians and Christians alike, a similar toothache will summon the Christian further “to seek and find his salvation … and the power of his own service only in the place extra se”. It prevents the Christian from overrating the significance of his Christian existence. It will make him aware of his feeble spirituality and harmless little faith. Thus, it will keep him humble and in solidarity with the children of men generally. So in this case, the Christian cross consists of a different reading (or interpretation) of what is one and the same toothache for all.

Apart from this, Christians do have a special believers’ experience of suffering in the phenomenon that Barth has described as “practical doubt”. In this case the cross laid upon the Christian is his suffering of despair concerning the genuine reality of the gospel, the reliability of God or the truthfulness of His kingdom. It signifies not so much the shadow side of creation but the dark side of faith which befell, for example, King Saul, the prophet Elijah, Jeremiah, the author of Lamentations, and others. It is this special cross that, according to Barth, provides for the sharpest form in which “a limit is set to the Christian”; and as a cross, it is the “fulfilment of his Sanctification” as well.

Thus, we are faced again with the paradoxical outcome and the epitome of cross-bearing mentioned earlier (nt. 382) The question is what actually is ‘fulfilled’ as regards our sanctification when it comes to this ultimate form of spiritual suffering. What is gained through this cross of despair with respect to sanctification? What is ‘fulfilled’ through the limitation it puts specifically to my being a Christian? The answer is that - while not evading our sanctification at this decisive point but, instead, by bearing it when faring through troubled waters - “we are not forsaken by the One who raised and answered the question whether He was not forsaken by God”. According to Barth, this is “comforting” because it is at this point that “we find ourselves in the deepest fellowship with Him”.

386 CD IV/2, 607f (687: „Das Kreuz bricht über die Christen herein, um auch die höchsten Offiziere dazu zu erziehen, jeden Morgen als gemeine Soldaten von vorne anzufangen“).
387 CD IV/2, 607 (686); the biblical illustrations are mine (ffo)
388 CD IV/2, 612f (693: “Das ist tröstlich (...) Wir befinden uns gerade dann in tiefster Gemeinschaft mit ihm”).
In reaction to this, two related questions may be asked: namely, whether such nearness to Christ can be experienced (as nearness) at all? And if so, how then can it be comforting? Can one be glad and rejoice (for being near to Christ) when this coincides with falling into this “bitterest form of the cross” which as “practical doubt” is actually a desperate absence of faith? This can hardly occur as comforting to anyone, since it is especially during the moments of despair (gerade damn) that in some higher reality we are supposed to be near to Him. But this higher reality is entirely contrarious to what at that moment is actually experienced! It is simply hard to experience yourself in the deepest fellowship with precisely the One from whom you feel at the very moment hopelessly separated. Actually, what Barth is saying has a different meaning if taken psychologically, theologically, or philosophically.

In a psychological sense, utter despair and genuine joy (or confidence) at one and the same moment are mutually exclusive. So, the statement about the vicinity to Christ at the very moment that we’re afraid of losing our faith can hardly be of any consolation to the one who is involved in such a form of cross-bearing.

Theologically, as well as with respect to pastoral counselling and questions of practical Christian life, it strikes me that suffering and the cross are proposed by Barth as the “most concrete form” (die konkreteste Gestalt) of fellowship between Christ and the Christian; and that particularly, the agony of doubt and losing faith is supposed to be “the deepest fellowship” with Him. What does this mean, for example, when we think of Peter, breaking into tears after denying his master trice; or of Judas, having betrayed his Lord and on the edge of suicide; or of John the Baptist despairing in prison that with Jesus the Kingdom had not come? Were they really nearer to the spiritual reality of God in Christ than were Maria, caressing the Lord’s feet with ointment; or the Moabite Ruth in her loyal allegiance to the unfortunate Naomi into an uncertain future; or Rahab, risking her life to shelter some unknown refugees?

This brings me to a more philosophical perspective on existential reality – what can be called a basic worldview or cosmology: a pre-experiential attitude towards reality. This worldview can be gauged through the question of what is implied in Barth’s commending the dignity of the cross as more or less the epitome of Sanctification? What basic perception of human reality as such is presupposed when, apparently, suffering and anxious doubt are recommended as bringing us closer to God than, for example, taking care, solidarity or simple obedience? The presupposition of this perspective seems to be an underlying attitude of other-worldliness (see 2.2.1.a) which bears similarity to the basic experience of actual reality in A Course in Miracles.

For now, it can be said, that Barth’s otherworldliness, his critical denial of (a divine or eternal quality inherent within) the present world, also covers the actuality of human suffering and the necessity of cross bearing. These human experiences, too, are this-worldly phenomena, and therefore transitory experiences. So, there is hope. The painful dignity of the cross is “provisional” as well, and so is the “nature of the Christian existence and all sanctification”. These phenomena and experiences are all not final, not the real thing. Therefore, the closing line of Barth’s entire paragraph on Sanctification can be one of Christian hope. Meant as a comfort, it is simultaneously revealing as regards Barth’s underlying cosmology or awareness of

389 Perhaps it is not entirely by chance that Barth is only speaking of human beings as “men” – in which I admit, I have mainly followed him - rendering to his theology a flavour of male dominance.
life: “There cannot lack a foretaste of joy even in the intermediate time of waiting, in the time of sanctification, and therefore in the time of the cross. The time of sanctification, epitomized in the time of the cross, is presented as an intermediate time of waiting, signifying human existence on earth as badly in need of some rays of comfort. Thus, the time of sanctification, instead of possibly, if not primarily, giving rise to transformation and joy, is presented as being in need of these itself. With such emphasis on cross bearing, Barth’s intermediate time of sanctification, reminds one inadvertently of the *Purgatorium* which the Catholics have always postponed with some benignity after death.

7.4. Inventory of findings

Similar to the procedure performed with respect to the New Age sources in Part Two, I will objectify the findings on the theologians by giving their answers to my four questions, as well as to the four esoteric benchmarks (developed by the anti-apologetic criticism, see 2.1.2.c.ii)). As most of the outcomes with Barth seem to be evident and clear-cut, I limit myself to just giving the results, and only account for the data that need some justification.

7.4.1 Four questions

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<th>Number</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Divine-human unity</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Denial orig. sin</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Denial of other evil</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Denial actual sin</td>
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The answers to the questions 1, 2, and 4 are rather obvious. Question 1: divine-human unity is not even stated by Barth with respect to Jesus Christ, as in particular in the God-man “there is no other subject apart from the Son of God” (7.3.2.c.i). Qu. 2: The notion original sin (*Ursünde*) is maintained, and so is the aspect of *non posse*. Human sanctification has been realized in Christ. That is to say that our holiness does not proceed from our own active potential and exertion. Instead, we are holy in dependence of the holiness of Jesus Christ, that is “in the truth and power of His holiness” (7.3.1.a). And with respect to Qu. 4: as the four explanations of sloth show clearly, sin is highly actual, according to Barth, either as ignorance, inhumanity, indiscipline or anxious care (7.2.2a).

The twofold (plus-minus) answer to Question 3 needs clarification. The reason for entering a plus-minus is due to Barth’s ambiguous doctrine of evil or Nothingness (*das Nichtige*). On the one hand Barth tends to reduce the ontological standing of evil (including its appearance as sin) to the minimal extent of illusory semblance. He emphasized its secondary status, maintaining that Nothingness comes to a shadow existence, only in full dependency on God’s sole initiative to elect and create something good. Thus, ontologically, evil has no substance of its own (7.2.1.a.i). On the other hand, the quality or nature of Nothingness is pictured by Barth as so evil (*böse*) and fearfully anti-divine that God had to make its extermination entirely his own cause in Jesus Christ (7.2.1.a.i, ii). Thus, ontologically, evil is practically denied, but according to its perverse quality it is taken entirely seriously. In fact, the plus-

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390 CD IV/2, 613 (694).
minus answer to this question reflects the discussions between those who interpret Barth more in monistic or in dualistic terms (see the end of 7.1.a; 7.2.1.a-b).

7.4.2 Four anti-apologetic benchmarks

(a) Co-eternity –
(b) Direct gnosis –
(c) Denial of individual soul ±
(d) Denial personal trans-mundane God –

Co-eternity (a) is incompatible with Barth’s idea of God’s eternal election to create (7.1.a), as well as with his endorsement of ‘creation from nothing’ (7.1.d). For the same reasons, denying divine personhood and transcendence (d) is not conform Barth’s theology. Rather, God chose to create a being “distinct from himself... as His creature and antithesis”, especially the human family, which He meant to participate in His own glory (7.1.a). Direct gnosis (b) can be seen as the epitome of what Barth denies. There is no “peaceful co-existence of God [and] man” in the situation of sinful sloth. And with respect to all forms of sin and sloth, there is no way leading out of it, except through the mediation of Jesus Christ. Even the exceptional idea within Barthian theology of “instinctive awareness” (7.2.2.b.ii), cannot obscure that the first form of human sloth is stupidity or ignorance. It is only through the mediating revelation and direction given in Jesus Christ that we can become wiser. Or even stronger, it is in Him and through him only that we are fully wise and informed about God already. But this shows all the more that with respect to natural or unmediated, direct knowledge of the divine we are, according to Barth, in a state of total “agnoosia theou” (7.2.2.a.i).

With respect to the benchmark ‘denial of individual’ (c), it is of course not my intention to suggest that Barth denied the individual human person, as if there were no responsible subject. Instead, with respect to sin the human person is held fully responsible. In all forms of sloth, only humans as individual persons are the acting subjects. Even in sloth, they are far from passive or slow, as instead, they seem to be active, free and strong to the extent of exerting a “superior capacity to act”. Therefore, I observed that Barth’s description of sloth has all the characteristics I would rather associate with pride (7.2.2.b.i). So, with respect to sinful sloth the individual human person bearing all responsibility is far from denied.

But when it comes to sanctification, transformation of one’s life, when humans make up their mind, and consciously want to leave the sinful reality of slothful behavior, they appear to be less capable. But then, as it appears, there is no need for their capability or initiative either. Since according to Barth, they basically are already enclosed in Jesus Christ, that is, in the fully sanctified human reality that in him is realized for them and before them. We, humans, are already uplifted in him and by him. There is little for us to add from ourselves, we only have to affirm, witness and attest to the genuine humanity which is present and actual in Jesus Christ, and which de iure is entirely ours already (7.3.1). Our conversion, described as turning on an axis, is basically not our movement but the movement of Christ (7.3.2.c.iii). In line with these insights, I have surmised that Barth, either knowingly or unknowingly takes participatio Christi as a subjective genitive. Our conversion, as turning on an axis, is
basically not our movement but his. Our sanctification is not that we intentionally and actively take personally part in what Christ has said and done. Instead it is he who has invaded, directed and thus: has intensely taken part in our life (see Intermezzo: 7.3.2.c.iv). This means that, as possible subject of doing well and living up to our true humanity in Jesus Christ, the human person is practically denied.

The results will be enclosed in the completed Inventory able and further discussed in the second intermediate paragraph (§ 9. Taking Stock (2)). For now, I turn to the next main theological voice coming from Paul Tillich.

**Introduction**

As opposed to Barth’s understanding of the infinite qualitative contrast in the divine-human relationship, Tillich supports some sort of identity or at least mutuality.  

When faced with polar opposites, Tillich is primarily interested in their dialectical connection, their mutual correlation as e.g., between religion and culture, philosophy and theology, between ‘being’ and God, reason and revelation, the human and the divine ... With respect to the divine-human relationship, two complementing perspectives are aptly juxtaposed by Tillich in “The two types of Philosophy of Religion”. The opening lines of this essay run as follows:

One can distinguish two ways of approaching God: the way of overcoming estrangement and the way of meeting a stranger. In the first way man discovers himself when he discovers God; he discovers something that is identical with himself although it transcends him infinitely, something from which he is estranged, but from which he never has been and never can be separated. In the second way man meets a stranger when he meets God …

Whereas Barth was determined to base theology exclusively on the divine Word and its revelation in Jesus Christ through which a strange God reveals himself, confronting us with a ‘strange new world’, Tillich was much inspired by his admired teacher Martin Kähler - and chose deliberately to be a theologian of mediation. He understood his role to be mediating between religion and culture at large, and, more specifically as a systematic theologian, between “the eternal criterion of truth as it is manifest in the picture of Jesus as the Christ” on the one hand, and “the changing experiences of individuals and groups, their varying questions and their categories of perceiving reality” on the other.

Systematic theology meant for Tillich a mediation between theology and philosophy. In order to interpret and represent the Christian message, Tillich let his the-
ology move “back and forth between the poles of the eternal truth of its foundation and the temporal situation” of his time, which became his method of correlation between existential questions and theological answers. Clearly, such a method requires a theological attitude of openness to the problems and to the cultural reactions that are already present in the “situation” in which the message is intended to enter. Mediation theology according to Tillich is apologetic or “answering theology.” It must be prepared to dig into the questions implied in human existence and to respond to them authentically. Tillich refused to accept “the split between a faith unacceptable to culture and a culture unacceptable to faith”. His entire Systematic Theology is presented by him as “the attempt to interpret the symbols of faith through expressions of our own culture.”

Thus, Tillich took the task of mediation in a similarly wide sense as Schleiermacher, the forerunner of 19th century mediation theology in Germany, had done. Then, the so-called *Vermittlungslehre* was primarily an attempt at mediation between two types of theology, namely the strictly rational Enlightenment theology on the one hand and church-bound, scripture-based Confessionalist theology on the other. In the following 20th century the main theological debate was raised by the dialectical theologians, in particular by Barth. In his eyes Schleiermacher was the ‘black swan’ of theology that had led most of his teachers astray. With the names of Barth and Schleiermacher the central theological controversy of the twentieth century is given. It is the opposition of two different sources of theology, which can be indicated as ‘revelation’ versus ‘experience’; transcendence versus immanence. Tillich positioned his theology, time and again, in connection to Barth and Schleiermacher. On the one hand, he declared himself “on the side of Schleiermacher,” but he also attached great importance to the critical element advocated by Barth, whose theology he both criticised and honoured. Theologically, Tillichean theology can be characterized as mediating between Barth and Schleiermacher, which I will show in the course of this paragraph.

7 *ST* I, 3.
8 For Tillich’s “method of correlation”, see *ST* I, 59ff.
9 *ST* I, 4; the “situation”, to which theology must respond, according to Tillich, is “the totality of man’s creative self-interpretation in a special period”.
10 *ST* I, 6 (12).
11 For a similar attitude towards the dilemma of faith vs. culture, or faith vs. science, see Schleiermacher in his “Sendschreiben an dr. Lücke”(1829), in: Schleiermacher auswahl (ed. Heinz Bolli), 146: „Soll der Knoten der Geschichte so auseinander gehn; das Christentum mit der Barbarei, und die Wissenschafter dem Unglauben?“.
12 *ST* III, 4f. (15).
14 As early as 1923, on the invitation of *Theologische Blätter*, Tillich and Barth (and Gogarten) had a short theological dispute, though without much mutual understanding. Tillich both agreed and disagreed with Barth and Gogarten: on the one hand, endorsing the critical side of their theology, the dialectical “no” which he honoured as their *kritische[s] Paradox*, and on the other hand, regretting the absence of a positive counterpart, the “yes” which must be implicit in it as ... *Positive[s] Paradox* and on the basis of which criticism (even divine criticism) is only possible (cf. “Kritisches und Positives Paradox, eine Auseinandersetzung mit Karl Barth und Friedrich Gogarten” (1923) in: Tillich, *GW* VII, 216-225). In a second and final contribution, Tillich expressed his feeling that the way Barth and Gogarten exercised dialectics might actually lead to an un-critical as well as un-dialectical *supra-naturalism* (italics ffo), see *GW* VII, 243. Tillich repeated his criticism of supranaturalism in one of his first English written articles: “What is wrong with dialectic Theology” in: *The Journal of Religion* (Chicago), 15, 2 (1935), 127-145, 127; also: *GW* VII, 247-262, 247. For examples of positive Tillichean valuation of precisely the critical aspect of Barthian theology, see 8.1.2.b.iii.
Apologetic or mediation theology, according to Tillich, presupposes the acceptance of a “common ground”\textsuperscript{15} between the answers of the Christian message and the questions arising from human existence. Both Scripture and the culture that one lives in are theologically relevant. Therefore Tillich accepted as sources of systematic theology the “almost unlimited richness [of] bible, church history, history of religion and culture”.\textsuperscript{16} To find the common ground, especially with the latter, one must try to “read the style of a culture … [to] discover its ultimate concern, its religious substance”. Theology should acknowledge the questions of its own culture and recognize the attempted answers.\textsuperscript{17} This kept Tillich in conversation with the history of religion and culture,\textsuperscript{18} as well as with his present time,\textsuperscript{19} with political thought,\textsuperscript{20} with social science,\textsuperscript{21} with artists, painters, novelists.\textsuperscript{22} They are all partners in human life and dealing with its common existential problems.

Accepting an endless variety of possible sources of systematic theology does of course raise the question of their relationship to revelation. To this question, Tillich maintains that the role of human experience is the role of reception of revelation and reacting to its content. As such, the many forms of human experience are possibly relevant sources for theology, but not the original source from which new contents proceed. Human experience is no more and no less than “the medium through which they are existentially received”.\textsuperscript{23} It does not produce new revelatory contents out of itself but forms so to speak the screen on which they appear and come to awareness. On this point Tillich even feels the need to take distance to Schleiermacher with whom, on the whole, he has close affinity.\textsuperscript{24} Although he praises Schleiermacher’s “experiential method”,\textsuperscript{25} he rejects what he calls his attempt “to derive all contents

\textsuperscript{15} ST I, 6;
\textsuperscript{16} ST I, 40 (51); ST I, 34 (45): “we must reject the assertion of neo-orthodox Biblicism that the Bible is the only source”. Still, the Bible did remain for Tillich the “basic source” of systematic theology (ST I, 51 (63f)). As the material norm for systematic theology Tillich adopted “the New Being in Jesus as the Christ” (ST I, 50 (62)), while the church was designated by him as “the ‘home’ of systematic theology” (ST I, 48 (60)).
\textsuperscript{17} ST I, 40; also: Theology of Culture, 42ff.: in every serious expression of cultural creativity “an ultimate concern is present. Its immediate expression is the style of a culture. He who can read the style of a culture can discover its ultimate concern, its religious substance”.
\textsuperscript{18} ST I, 38.
\textsuperscript{19} E.g. “The lost dimension in Religion”, in: The Saturday Evening post, June 14, 1958, 28, 29, 76, 78, 79.
\textsuperscript{20} Tillich’s attitude towards religious socialism, see “Kairos”, in Protestant Era, 37-58, esp. 55; originally published as “Kairos” I (1922) in: GW VI, 9-28; for a brief discussion of Tillich’s relationship to religious socialism, see: Schüßler & Sturm, Paul Tillich, Leben, Werk, Wirkung, 95-113.
\textsuperscript{21} Cf. contacts with psychologists like Rollo May, Carl Rogers. Tillich was Lecturing Guest at the Esalen Institute, founded in 1962, organizing a vast range of seminars and conferences on issues of Religion, Psychology and Contemporary Culture, which in the early years was definitely New Age; see: Kripal, Esalen; Kripal & Shuck (eds.), On the edge; Anderson, Upstart Spring.
\textsuperscript{22} Cf. Tillich, Religious Situation, 85-101.
\textsuperscript{23} ST I, 42.
\textsuperscript{24} See ST I, 41 (where he explains Schleiermacher’s “feeling of absolute dependence” as “the immediate awareness of something unconditional”. This sounds very much like his own definition of religion as “ultimate concern – it’s being grasped by something unconditional” (see Tillich, Theology of Culture, 24ff). Schleiermacher is localized by Tillich as standing in the Augustinian-Franciscan tradition, to which he has close affinity himself. Feeling in this tradition is not a psychological function but refers “to the awareness of that which transcends intellect and will, subject and object”, ST I, 41f (52).
\textsuperscript{25} See ST I, 41 (52), where Tillich observes that no present-day theology should neglect Schleiermacher’s “experiential method”, on pain of missing the theological development of the last two hundred years.
of the Christian faith from the religious consciousness of the Christian”. Though I doubt that his criticism of Schleiermacher is correct (see below), what Tillich implies is that human consciousness should not be made into a source of revelation in its own right. He rejects that new revelatory contents can be creatively obtained from our own intra-mental realm as primary source. Thus, Tillich could emphasize that the core event which is the basis of Christianity “is not derived from experience; it is given in history”.27

As opposed to Tillich’s suggestion that Schleiermacher held religious feeling for the original place where contents are produced, I would argue that Schleiermacher’s “feeling” (Gefühl) is rather the method through which contents are discovered, the means or, indeed, the medium through which they are obtained. But the contents originate elsewhere. As Schleiermacher observes in the second of his Speeches (1799): “Religion’s essence is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling. It wishes to intuit the universe, wishes devoutly to overhear the universe’s own manifestation and actions, longs to be grasped and filled by the universe’s immediate influences in childlike passivity”.28 In fact, Schleiermacher understood religion and religious feeling fundamentally as a ‘receiving’ attitude of life, an open attitude of letting yourself be grasped. He saw religion as standing in contrast to science/metaphysics (Denken) and morality (Handeln). Thinking and acting, in contrast to ‘religion’, are depicted by Schleiermacher as utterly anthropocentric: “Metaphysics and morals see in the whole universe only humanity as the centre of all relatedness, as the condition of all being and the cause of all becoming”.29

Actually, according to Schleiermacher, it is not religion but philosophy (metaphysics) that “proceeds from finite human nature and wants to define consciously … what the universe can be for us and how we necessarily must view it”.30 But the origin of the contents of the religious feeling or intuition lies elsewhere. It is the Universe that “exists in uninterrupted activity and reveals itself to us every moment. Every form that it brings forth, every being to which it gives separate existence according to the fullness of life, every occurrence that spills forth from its rich, ever-fruitful womb, is an action of the same upon us. Thus, to accept everything individual as a part of the whole and everything limited as a representation of the infinite is religion”.31 Clearly, the contents are not produced by the religious feeling of the recipient human being, but stem from the other side. This he confirmed in The Christian Faith (1830), when speaking with respect to the content of religious feeling: “But any such sensible determination of the self-consciousness points back to a determinant outside of (italics, ffo) the self-consciousness”.32 I conclude that according to Schleiermacher, the origin of an experience and of the content of a religious feeling does not coincide with the experience or feeling itself. This is further illustrated by his famous circumscription of God as the ‘Whence’, i.e., as the ‘origin of our receptive and active existence’33. Therefore, Tillich’s criticism at this point must be considered inadequate. Actually, the same verdict applies to Karl Barth, who similarly but much more strongly rejected

26  ST I, 42; according to Tillich, this was especially the method in Schleiermacher, Christian Faith. Similarly, followers of Schleiermacher, like Hofmann and Frank, tried to derive all theological contents “from the experience of the regenerated Christian”.
27  ST I, 42 (53).
28  Schleiermacher, On Religion, 22 (79 (50f)). The last number (50f) refers to the very first edition by Joh. Fr. Unger, 1799).
29  On Religion, 23 (79 (51)).
30  On Religion, 23 (80 (51).
31  On Religion, 25 (82 (56)).
32  Christian Faith (§30,1), 125 (= Der Christliche Glaube I, 163f).
33  Christian Faith (§ 4,4), 16 (28f: the designation Gott refers to: das im frommen Selbstbewußtsein “mit-gesetzte Woher unseres empfänglichen und selbsttätigen Daseins”).
Schleiermacher for thinking theologically ‘vom Menschen her’ (cf. Schleiermacherauswahl, 312). Both Tillich and Barth are one-sided on this point.

Actually, Tillich discarded the presumed, creative potential that goes beyond the given basis of Christianity only formally with respect to the work of Schleiermacher, but he rejected it explicitly and materially in connection with the pragmatic method of recent, that is of post-war “experiential theology”:

The encounter with great non-Christian religions, the evolutionary scheme of thought, the openness for the new … have had the consequence that experience has become not only the main source of systematic theology but an inexhaustible source out of which new truths can be taken continually. Being open for new experiences which might even pass beyond the confines of Christian experience is now the proper attitude of the theologian.  

This critical observation of a pragmatic, experiential trend in post-war theology is also applicable to similar and even more radical developments beyond mainstream theology and also outside ecclesiastical religion, such as the emergence of non-institutional forms of personal spirituality and popular religion, designated as New Age Religion in the 1960/70s and further.

The point Tillich makes is that all kind of human experience and expression is relevant as a source for systematic theology, but only as a medium with respect to revelation. As a medium it is not allowed to independently produce new revelatory contents beyond the “unique event Jesus the Christ” being “the criterion of every religious experience”  

As a medium it only intends to receive, even though any medium to some extent “colours the presentation and determines the interpretation of what it receives”. Tillich concludes that what comes to us through a medium is always a “transformation” of what is received by the medium. A transformation is neither a repetition, nor a new production. Clearly, it is his intention to acknowledge both Schleiermacher’s emphasis on experience and the critical and normative attitude represented by Barth when he states:

Even the saint must listen to what the Spirit says to his spirit, because the saint is also a sinner. There may be revelation through him, as there was through prophets and apostles. But this revelation comes against him and to him and not from him. Insight into the human situation destroys every theology which makes experience an independent source instead of a dependent medium …

This may suffice to characterize Tillich as a mediating figure both on the field of theology between Barth and Schleiermacher and with respect to the dialogue between traditional and popular religion, between a faith intentionally based on revelation on the one hand, and experiential spirituality, proceeding from inner awareness and experience, as practiced within the New Age movement, on the other. Following the familiar procedure, I will discuss Tillichean perspectives with respect to the main elements Cosmology (8.1), Hamartiology (8.2), and Human Potential (8.3). In 8.4, I will collect the results and enter them in the Inventory table (shown in § 9).

34 ST I, 45 (57).
35 ST I, 46 (57).
36 ST I, 46 (58).
8.1 Cosmology – ontology

The name Tillich gave to philosophizing about an adequate cosmology or worldview is ontology. Ontology, as reflecting on the conditions of being, is what Aristotle did in his works designated as ‘metaphysics’. It is the so-called “first philosophy”, which is about the presuppositions of being. The first question to be asked, says Tillich, is the question of being itself: What is always thought implicitly or explicitly if something is said to be? In fact this was Tillich’s lifelong quest, as he describes in one of his last lectures, posthumously edited as My Search for Absolutes.

Tillich’s philosophical quest started in his adolescence as a kind of escape from the restrictive atmosphere and spiritual pressure in his parental home. His father loved to use philosophy in defending traditional Lutheranism, as he was convinced “that there can be no conflict between a true philosophy and revealed truth”. This led to many philosophical discussions that helped the son develop a more positive relation to his father. Simultaneously, it guided him towards an “independent philosophical position”, a theoretical and practical state of “autonomy” that he prepared never to surrender to the heteronomous demands of any system of thought or life.

Clearly, such spiritual and philosophical autonomy can match with Christian faith only on the presupposition that there is a common basis underlying the respective subject matter of philosophy and theology. For Tillich senior this meant the possibility of using philosophical tools to uphold his traditional Lutheranism. For the son, it implied the facilitation for mediation, for seeking to recognize and elaborate at all levels of intellectual and spiritual reality elements of unity, points of common interest, and overlap.

This seems to stand in contrast to ST I, 26, where Tillich, strangely enough, appears to be literally denying a common basis between theology and philosophy. Wilhelm Weischedel was also not convinced that this really is his position. While admitting that “occasionally” Tillich denies the common basis, Weischedel indicates that Tillich points to many conformities and elements of agreement, as e.g., that both philosophy and theology ask for our unconditioned concern. Moreover, Tillich’s general and methodical goal (methodischer Gesamtintention) is to show that ontology and biblical religion, philosophy and theology “in spite of the tremendous tension … have an ultimate unity and a profound interdependence”. Granting more impor-

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37 ST I, 163 (193).
38 My Search for Absolutes, 31, 32.
39 My Search, 31, 32: Tillich describes his father as a “strong supporter of the conservative Lutheran point of view” (31); his mother as deeply influenced by the “rigid morals of Western Reformed Protestantism”. In combination with parental love this led to unavoidable moments of guilt consciousness (32).
40 My search, 32.
41 Points of unity, overlap and correlation, namely between philosophy and theology, the unconditional and the conditioned, the human and the divine; the different, and partly opposite use of philosophy made by senior and junior illustrate that the adoption of a common ground is prerequisite for both theology and philosophy, as well as for their contents, in order to either agree or disagree sensibly. Similarly, apologetics presuppose “common ground …” with those who ask questions, so a common basis (“however vague it may be”, ST I, 6) is indispensable for two disciplines or systems of thought to be in dialogue, or to be anyhow commensurable.
42 Weischedel, Der Gott der Philosophen II, 104: „Zwar behauptet er gelegentlich: „Es gibt keine gemeinsame Basis zwischen Theologie und Philosophie‘ …”.
43 Weischedel, Der Gott der Philosophen, 105: „Es liegt ihm daran zu zeigen, daß Ontologie und biblische Religion, Philosophie und Theologie eine letzte Einheit bilden und eine tiefe gegenseitige Abhängigkeit aufweisen, trotz des ungeheurem Abstandes zwischen beiden”. Weischedel refers to Tillich, GW V, 138
stance to Tillich’s denial of a common basis is Wessel Stoker. According to him, it is part of Tillich’s argument for a strict “division of common property” (Dutch: boedelscheiding) between faith and science, in order to maintain the scientific status of theology over against the then (around the 1950s) dominant logical-positivistic inspired views on what is academic science.44

In my interpretation, Tillich actually argues for two common bases when he is denying the existence of one. Both the philosopher and the theologian must stand on both of these bases, though with different intensity. The primary basis for the philosopher is derived from the “ontological analysis of the structure of being”. The basis (and primary task) for the theologian is to give a “theological analysis” which deals with “existentially conditioned elements” (ST I, 26). Thus, philosophy and theology each have their own primary basis, respectively rational power conforming to the universal logos and existential passion looking for ultimate concern (I,26f).

But, as Tillich makes clear, every significant philosophy, although based on reason, must also include elements of existential passion (ultimate concern) that give it colour and direction. Actually, he states “that the truth value of a philosophy is dependent on the amalgamation of these two elements” (I, 27). Similarly, the truth value of a theology, apart from leaning on its basic concern with existential aspects, is always co-dependent on a thorough ontological analysis based on reason and logic. This last remark is in particular applicable to the theology of Tillich himself.

Clearly, Tillich’s denial of a common basis between theology and philosophy is highly ambiguous. Actually, he demands for both disciplines that they partly share and fully acknowledge each other’s primary basis. The same ambiguity on Tillich’s part returns in the introduction to ST II with respect to the method of correlation. There Tillich presents as the first statement implied in the method of correlation that “existential questions and theological answers are independent of each other”. Then he goes on saying that the “second and more difficult problem is that of the mutual dependence of questions and answers” (ST II,14 (italics mine)). Surely indeed, mutual dependence of two things is a difficult matter when they are first declared to be independent from each other. As will be shown below, I now take for granted that the tendency in Tillichean philosophy and theology to accept a (twofold) common basis is predominant.

The assumption of ‘common ground’ and, on that basis, the search for the element or principle that connects all being, form the essence and practice of Tillich’s method of correlation and of his entire theology. Thus, all five parts of his main work Systematic Theology carry the name of a philosophic-theological pair of correlates: reason and revelation, being and God, ordinary human existence and the Christ, human life and the divine Spirit, mundane history and the Kingdom of God.45

For this reason, my methodological division of each paragraph into three main sections is only partly applicable to the work of Tillich. With respect to the present section (8.1 Cosmology), it would not be possible to describe all of Tillichean ontology or cosmology without simultaneously including parts of his theology. Or putting it the other way around, and with respect to the next, more explicitly theological sections (8.2 and 8.3): one cannot adequately describe Tillich’s perspective on the substance of sin or ‘sanctification’ without discussing elements of his general ontological analysis of human reality. Therefore, some elements of his ontological worldview – such as e.g., the fundamental ontological distinction between essential and exis-


45 Tillich always refers to Jesus as “the” Christ: according to Berkhof, 200 Jahre Theologie, 285 “um dessen Überindividualität anzudeuten”, to indicate that his humanity has universal meaning.

46 See the five structural parts of Tillich’s main work Systematic Theology.
tential being – will remain underdeveloped under the present heading Cosmology where they, strictly speaking, belong. But they will be brought to attention in the other main sections, that is, at the theologically appropriate time.

Coming from the philosophical side, Tillich called the common basis of all reality the Unconditional (das Unbedingte) which he largely equated with God, though to varying extents. Both notions (God and the Unconditional) refer to the absoluteness and transcendence of ultimate reality as Tillich sees it. Firstly, I will describe some main aspects of the transcendent side of both notions, their ontological place and meaning; and how both concepts relate to one another, within Tillich’s cosmology (8.1.1 Transcendent absolutes: the Unconditional (das Unbedingte) and God). Secondly, I will turn to the immanent or human side which is about Tillich’s perspective on the divine or unconditional element as immanent dynamic within all being (8.1.2 The unconditional/divine element within all being).

8.1.1 Transcendent absolutes: the Unconditional (das Unbedingte) and God

The autonomy that Tillich developed through philosophy in reaction to the authoritarian orthodoxy of his father goes along with his “desire to avoid traditional language in speaking of religion”. According to James Luther Adams, it became something like a vocation to Tillich to be a “framer of a new … unfamiliar language, particularly in order to overcome the spurious concepts of religion”.47 These two motives (to be autonomous and innovative) come together in Tillichean philosophical theology, in the method he followed and in the contents, in the ontological concepts he coined to describe and interconnect the reality of human experience and the religious reality of the divine, to combine and interrelate philosophical and theological truth.

The method of correlation implied the attempt to relate all cultural realms to the religious centre. With this passion for mediation, Tillich gave lectures and wrote articles on many different subjects. The advantage of such relatively short studies was, that they “can be like screws, drilling into untouched rocks”.48 They can be efficient in taking relatively quick steps ahead, providing new discoveries in a certain demarcated area. The shortcomings of this procedure, as Tillich also acknowledged, are “a certain inconsistency and indefiniteness of terminology”. Even in a well-organized work as Systematic Theology, he admits, there are different or “competitive motives of thought, and there is a taking for granted of concepts and arguments which have been dealt with in other places”.49 Tillich has indeed been criticized, both from theological and philosophical sides, for the prolific ease and subsequent inconclusiveness of his use of concepts and his now and then shifting philosophical definitions.50 even

48 My Search, 44.
49 My Search, 44ff.
50 See the discussions in reaction to the first volume of Systematic Theology: Kegley, (ed.), The theology of Paul Tillich (revised ed. 1982), with critical contributions from both philosophers (like John Herman Randall, jr., Charles Hartshorne) and theologians (like e.g., Reinhold Niebuhr); for a similar discussion by representatives of both disciplines, now of Tillich’s take of “The religious symbol”, and its consequences for religion and faith, meaning and truth, see Hook, Sidney (ed.), Religious Experience and Truth, based on the proceedings of the Fourth Annual Meeting of the New York University Institute of Philosophy (1960); a critical discussion of Tillich as creator of “Philosophischen Theologie”, see Weischedel, W., Gott der Philosophen, 87-111; on the point of lack of scientific strictness, Schüßler, Paul Tillich, 17, points to a remark about Tillich’s scientific method, by Hans-Georg Gadamer, belong-
though his articles, sermons, and many of his essays evoked a wide resonance and large response, in many parts of society as well as in the academy.\footnote{51}

In the present section I will introduce Tillich’s basic, ontological concept of the Unconditional and discuss how this concept relates to its religious equivalent, the central theological notion ‘God’. I will describe their occurrence and place within Tillich’s philosophical approach of religion and its subject matter. For this agenda I will take as my point of departure an early article in which Tillich attempts to replace the ordinary objectifying concept of religion by his own ontological view of religion (a. Religion and its subject matter as inconceivable). From there, I will further address some mutually related questions, namely how Tillich overcame the concept of religion (b. The Unconditional as ground of religion). With respect to the ontological identity of what Tillich calls the Unconditional, the obvious question to be asked is: from where did he get this notion? (c. Origin of “the Unconditional”). Until this point, the underlying question in the subsections concerns the relationship between the Unconditional and everything conditioned, while the Unconditional and God seem to be identified by Tillich without much consideration.

The following sections d and e are meant to supply for this consideration, particularly about the relationship between the philosophical and the theological concepts of the Unconditional and God. To that purpose I will ask: what does the conquest of the philosophical concept of religion mean for theology and for theological concepts of God, that is, including the word ‘God’ itself? (d. The Unconditional and God). And, finally, in order to illumine the hermeneutical nature or status of these concepts, I will concentrate on Tillich’s doctrine of symbol (e. Religion speaks through symbols).

\section*{8.1.1.a. Religion and its object matter as inconceivable}

An early example of drilling into untouched rocks was a lecture Tillich gave in 1922, entitled “The conquest of the Concept of Religion in the philosophy of religion”.\footnote{52} In this lecture, his intention is, on the one hand, to evade the “dissolutioning to the school of Heidegger in Marburg where Tillich occupied a theological professorship for three semesters. Gadamer: “Wir Heidegger-Schüler fanden Tillichs Art viel zu wenig fundiert in wirklicher Forschung” (cited from ENGW V, 166).

Tillich’s influence and working is portrayed in Schüßler, W. & Sturm, E., \textit{Paul Tillich, Leben, Werk, Wirkung}, 215ff. as that of a highly inspiring personality, a “charismatic teacher” (charismatischer Lehrer, 215); and as “a productive spiritual writer, though not a genuine scientist” (ein produktiver Geist, aber kein eigentlich wissenschaftlicher Kopf (218). The last qualification was articulated by Bultmann who, not unlike Gadamer, estimated that Tillich’s “speculative work” did not consist in “research and scientific analysis but in construction” (cited by Schüßler & Sturm, 218). But on all levels, Tillich is praised for his fabulous capacity to read the style of his time, his instinct to intuit and represent the spiritual feelings and cravings of modern humankind. This explains why Tillich’s lectures were often crowded with students and interested listeners; and that he was widely read. Tillich’s publications are to a large extent collections of lectures around a certain theme, such as \textit{The religious Situation} (1956) which is the translation of \textit{Die Religiöse Lage der Gegenwart} (1926), \textit{The Protestant Era} (1948); \textit{The dynamics of Faith} (1957); \textit{Theology of Culture} (1959); widely read were his collections of sermons held for the academic community of Union Theological Seminary: \textit{The Shaking of Foundations} (1949), \textit{The New Being} (1955), \textit{The Eternal Now} (1963). Beyond the specialized disciplines of theology and philosophy, Tillich really became a public figure with the publication of a set of lectures given at Yale on the invitation of the Terry Foundation, under the highly evocative title: \textit{The Courage to be} (1952).

Together with Tillich’s article “Religionsphilosophie” (contribution to: \textit{Lehrbuch der Philosophie} Bd. 2, edited by Max Dessoir, Ullstein: Berlin 1925) and a lecture “Über die Idee einer Theologie der Kultur” (1919), Tillich’s “Die Überwindung des Religionsbegriff in der Religionsphilosophie” (1922) was published in English in: Tillich, \textit{What is religion}, 122-154. The original lecture, delivered before the Kant Association in Berlin 1922 is enclosed in: GW I, 365-388.
(Aufhebung) of religion through culture\textsuperscript{53} which happens when religion is defined on the basis of finite, conditioned reality. According to Tillich, this is what philosophy of religion has often tried to do, namely treating the divine or unconditioned element of religion as a possible object of philosophical conceptualization.\textsuperscript{54} Instead, Tillich tries to understand religion, not dogmatically but philosophically (!), as a “breakthrough of the unconditionally real as the ground or reality of the whole of culture in all its functions”.\textsuperscript{55} Thus, he advocates for a philosophy of religion that starts with the Unconditional, with God, and not with the conditioned reality of human, all too human religion.\textsuperscript{56}

The logical as well as material problem Tillich was facing is that turning religion into a concept contains an inevitable paradox:

“Religion” is the concept of a reality which through this very concept is destroyed. Yet the concept is unavoidable. The point is to use it in such a way that its destructive force is eliminated through its subordination to a higher concept. That, however, is the concept of the Unconditional\textsuperscript{57}.

Clearly, the concept “religion” can be used in a double way. Philosophy of religion is criticized by Tillich for using it in a general sense to denote a product or “function” of the human spirit.\textsuperscript{58} Religion is then deduced either from the human self, from the world, from human culture; or from the history of religions. In all these cases, the Unconditional depends upon the conditioned and is thereby “destroyed” according to Tillich, namely in its unconditional nature. But religion can also be used “in a more precise, polemical sense”,\textsuperscript{59} namely as impact proceeding from the Unconditional, a “consuming fire over against every autonomous function of the human spirit”.\textsuperscript{60} In this perspective, the essence of religion is revelation, the Unconditional “breaking through every mode of relativization”.\textsuperscript{61} Tillich calls this “absolute religion” which can be found in all religions, namely as a “momentary and vital breakthrough of the Unconditional”.\textsuperscript{62} This essence of religion is never an objective fact that can be shackled in human concepts or words, since it is God himself “shattering the claim of religion to absoluteness … by revealing his unconditionality”.\textsuperscript{63} Religion in this latter, absolute sense protests against the dominance of both rational and critical concepts of religion that suggest a possibility of distanced objectification.

\textsuperscript{53} What is religion, 148 (GW I, 384).
\textsuperscript{54} What is Religion, 122f. (GW I, 367); according to Tillich, the Unconditional as un-conditioned can never become object of human theory as it stands beyond the antithesis subject/object.
\textsuperscript{55} What Is Religion, 148; more or less evaluating his essay, Tillich mentions that it is only meant to indicate “the manner in which this breakthrough could be effected within the scientific realm”. Tillich admits that the attempt may be in need of improvement but “there can be no doubt for me concerning the objective (viz. breakthrough)”.\textsuperscript{56} What is religion, 148.
\textsuperscript{57} What is religion, 124 (GW I, 368).
\textsuperscript{58} What is religion, 126 (GW I, 369).
\textsuperscript{59} What is religion, 124.
\textsuperscript{60} What is religion, 127 (GW I, 370).
\textsuperscript{61} What is religion, 145 (GW I, 382).
\textsuperscript{62} What is religion, 147 (GW I, 384).
\textsuperscript{63} What is religion, 147f.
The problem Tillich is addressing here in philosophical terms is very close to the one Karl Barth addressed in theological terms in the very same year in “The Word of God and the task of the ministry” (1922). Barth put the problem in front of the more inner circle of theologians and ministers in the following way. As ministers we must speak about God, preach the Word of God, but we can’t, because we are humans and God entirely transcends us. Only God can speak the Word of God. Tillich’s notion of the Unconditional (das Unbedingte) likewise emphasizes the transcendence of God who can never become an object of human research. Instead, the Unconditional itself must break through into our reality. On the very point of the unconditional character of the Unconditional, Tillich expressed his “spiritual affinity” with the main concern of Barth and Gogarten, a recognition which was far from reciprocal. Whereas Barth swerved towards the Word that became human exclusively in Jesus Christ, and thus towards a source and medium for revelation that is external to ordinary humans, Tillich turned to inner immediacy with respect to the medium, namely the human reception of revelation. But with respect to the ultimate source, namely the unconditional or divine impact in all genuine religion, Tillich saw the necessity and indispensability of revelation no different from Barth. Both reckoned with real (divine, unconditional) intervention from beyond the subject-object polarity of human existence.

After the disenchanted and objectifying approach to religion in strictly rational and critical times, according to Tillich it was romantic philosophy that supplied a bridge towards a new spirit of immediate or “ontological consciousness of God”. This materialized in the beginning of the 20th century in the form of phenomenological philosophy; and in a spiritual movement “away from the objective-technical apprehension of the world to an immediate-intuitive one”. Conceptualization of the Unconditional in the sense of objectification, thereby making it dependent on the conditioned subject-object sphere, can only be overcome in a philosophy of religion that “apprehend[s] the Unconditional in everything conditioned as that which grounds both itself and the conditioned”. The obvious question is: how, then, runs the argument with which the concept of religion is conquered? How can we speak about the Unconditional without destroying it?

8.1.1.b. The Unconditional as ground of religion

The concept Tillich intended to overcome is that of religion in the more general sense in which religion and the Unconditional are described as based on something conditioned, be it the human self, the world, human culture or religious tradition. When religion is seen from the standpoint of the human self, it is the human self-cen-

64 See “The Word of God and the Task of the ministry” (1922), in: Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, 181-217, 198f: “To speak of God would be to speak God’s word, the word which can come only from him, the word that God becomes man”.
65 What is religion, 123 (G.W. I, 367f): with respect to Barth and Gogarten and their concern with the Word, Tillich observed: “I have been surprised to see how, without mutual influence, the unqualified affirmation of the Unconditional within philosophy of religion as in religious thinking proper has led us to the same position in principle” (italics fio).
66 The surprise was not mutual, as appeared in a rare discussion between Tillich and the dialectic theologians a year later. Barth referred to the term ‘Unconditional’ as a “frozen monstrosity” (see James Luther Adams in his introduction to What is religion, 14). The discussion between Tillich, Barth and Gogarten is enclosed in Tillich, GW VII, 216-246; Barth could barely hide his irritation, 231: Warum dieses Versteckspiel mit dem frostigen Ungeheuer “das Unbedingte”? 67 What is religion, 134 (GW I, 375).
68 What is religion, 137 (GW I, 377).
tainty that appears as “the basis for certainty of God”. But self-certainty, says Tillich, contains two factors. One factor is the “unconditionality of an apprehension of reality that lies beyond subject and object”. The other factor is the “participation” of the subjective self in this supporting, unconditional reality. It is especially noted by Tillich that in this apprehending and participating, the self is only the medium. It is “not that which upholds but rather that which is upheld”. But then, as apprehending and participating medium, the human self can have a religious or an unreligious focus.

The possibility exists for the ego to experience its self-certainty in such a way that the unconditional relation to reality contained within it stands in the foreground. This is the apriori religious mode of self-apprehension. On the other hand, the possibility exists for the ego to experience its self-certainty in such a manner that its relation to its own being stands in the foreground. This is the apriori unreligious mode of self-apprehension.

In this presentation, the either more or less religious apprehension of reality is interdependent with a difference in personal attitude or taste that reminds one of the role Schleiermacher gave to “imagination” (Phantasie). According to Tillich, it depends on the “spirit’s intention”, either extraverted or more self-centred, either reductionistic-critical or more spiritually-imaginative. In the one case, the self tries to see beyond its self-certainty to “the ground of reality upon which it is based”. In the other case, the self just sticks to its own detached state and to its consciousness of certainty without religious imagination of an underlying ground. Tillich emphasizes, however, that also in the latter case the underlying ground remains effective. The difference religious-unreligious only exists as an attitude or in awareness. It is a matter of subjective intention, but there is “no consciousness unreligious in substance”. Thus Tillich intends to overcome the concept of religion seen as a function of the self by stating that every “self-apprehension contains, as its foundation within reality, the relation to the Unconditional”. As this remark is supposed to be valid irrespective of whether the unconditional element is subjectively acknowledged or not, it is clearly intended as an ontological statement. This means that, primarily and basically, religion and its subject matter are not presented as demonstrable contents of human awareness, but rather as ground and foundation that precede it.

In relationship to cultural expressions too, religion according to Tillich cannot be founded upon culture, as is suggested by ordinary conceptualization of religion. Religion is not just another cultural or spiritual function, next to the logical, aesthetic, ethical and social ones. Instead of being a separate function next to others, Tillich identifies the religious function as the root function of the spirit, namely “the function of unconditionality”. Far from being isolated from the other functions, this root function “comes to expression in and through them”. It is the function of the

69 What is religion, 138 (GW I, 377).
70 What is religion, 138 (GW I, 377)
72 See above § 1.2.1 (On Religion, 53 (113).
73 What Is Religion, 139; ffo: analogous to Schleiermacher’s, imagination, Phantasie.
74 See What is religion, 138f.
75 What is religion, 139 (GW I, 378).
spirit that “penetrates to its ground”. As such, it is only paradoxically a function since it is not controlled by the carrying subject. Instead, it correlates with a class of acts originating from elsewhere, stemming from out of a depth; acts that “only take on a specific character by breaking into the medium of consciousness”. In essence, Tillich concludes, this is “the relation to the Unconditional inherent in every act”. In this way he can restate, now with respect to culture, that the unconditional element in every cultural expression can be absent intentionally but not substantially.

In a similar way, Tillich tries to overcome the concept of religion/the Unconditional if seen as depending on the other forms of conditioned reality, namely world, and history of religions. With respect to the world: even if one renounces the reality of God, even if one disregards the relation to the Unconditional, there still is something unconditionally real within every actuality. One may subjectively consider the world to be independent, “in substance it can never be so”.

Finally, the regular conceptualization of religion implies that the absolute divine act of revelation is neatly pigeonholed in different ways as provided for by the history of religions. But in this way actual impact of revelation is made dependent on human spiritual life; the absolute divine act becomes “a relative evolution of man’s religious spirit”. And the concept of religion, then, works as a “leveler, putting the divine and the human on the same plane”. True or absolute religion, however, is not identical with one religion or another. It is “never an objective fact” but it can occur in all religions as “a momentary and vital breakthrough of the Unconditional” which is tantamount to God himself “revealing his unconditionality”. Again, Tillich’s reasoning amounts to stating that “the sustaining element is the Unconditional, and God’s activity is the substance without which religion cannot exist”.

In all four cases (of self, culture, world, religions) Tillich’s ontological certainty with respect to the Unconditional reminds one inadvertently of the typical ‘realism’ we met with Barth (see 7.1.b; 7.3.1.a-b). The question that prompts itself is: how and ‘where from’ did Tillich obtain his ontological insight? – which is close to asking for the origin of both his philosophy and theology.

8.1.1.c. ORIGIN OF “THE UNCONDITIONAL” – METAPHYSICAL APRIORI

The answer to the question from where Tillich took his absolute principle which he called the Unconditional (das Unbedingte), is simply that it is a basic or axiomatic assumption, an ontological or ‘metaphysical apriori’. The Unconditional as the core of absolute religion is not an object, nor a person. It cannot be found in the ordinary subject-object reality. Rather, it is the “presupposition for every possible antithesis of subject and object”. In a similar way, Tillich adopted the Unconditional or the unconditional element as the philosophical presupposition and central element of meaning.

76 What is Religion, 140-148 (GW I, 379-384), 142.
77 What is Religion, 142f; 143.
78 What is Religion, 142.
79 What is Religion, 145.
80 What is Religion, 147f; 148.
81 What Is Religion, 139.
In an article “Religionsphilosophie” (1925), originally published in Max Dessoir, *Lehrbuch der Philosophie*, Tillich defined unconditional meaning (*Sinn*) as the “common characteristic and the ultimate unity” of all expressions of the human spirit, both in the theoretical and in the practical sphere, as can be observed in all structures of scientific and aesthetic, legal and social activity (56f (*GW* I, 318)). He defined philosophy as the theory of “the structure of meaning-reality” and of “the principles of meaning”. Philosophy’s first task is to analyse meaning itself and the elements that constitute it (57 (318)).

Tillich distinguished three elements of meaning, firstly the awareness of a universal interconnection of all separate meaning, implying the totality or unity of “the world” (57). Secondly and fundamentally, the awareness of the presence of an “unconditioned meaning … in every particular meaning” (57). Thirdly, meaning implies a demand to correspond to or to fulfil meaning. All meaning, both in its totality and in its presence in every particular meaning, is upheld by the “presupposition of an unconditioned meaningfulness”. This presumed element of unconditionality is according to Tillich not one meaning among many others, it rather is “the ground of meaning” (57f (319)). Thus, the unconditional and grounding element, which he called “the Unconditional” (*das Unbedingte*) is similarly presupposed in all phenomena of meaning as in all forms of being, discussed above in its distinguished spheres of self, culture, world, and the history of religions (see 8.1.1b).

Apparently, the concept of the Unconditional as presented by Tillich is a philosophical or ontological postulation, a metaphysical *apriori*, assuming that the Unconditional is the “supporting ground” of every theoretical judgment or meaning in addition to this, it grounds both itself and everything conditioned. This “absolute presupposition” is applied theoretically in the supposition that “God-certainty is the certainty of the Unconditional contained in and grounding the self-certainty of the ego”. The implication according to Tillich is that the certainty of God is “utterly independent of any other presuppositional certainty”. Again, I note that this is meant by Tillich to be true irrespective of subjective experience or affirmation. In his perspective, certainty of God is in an implicit way present in every human certainty, although it only receives its “decisive religious distinction” when explicitly acknowledged. This view is not unlike the *de iure*-realism we met with Barth (§ 7.3.1.a). As Tillich puts it, we can subjectively or intentionally be God-less but objectively considered, in terms of ontology “all consciousness is related to God”. Some critical questions regarding the plausibility of Tillich’s picture of the unconditional Absolute and/or God and their grounding immanence within all being, will be discussed below (8.1.2).

Until now, I have concentrated on what Tillich sees as absolute reality, the Unconditional and its importance as the carrying ground to everything conditioned. The
terms ‘Unconditional’ and ‘God’ were largely used as synonyms. In the next subsections I will turn to their differentiation.

8.1.1.d. The Unconditional and God

So far, the philosophical and the theological absolute, God and the Unconditional, seemed to be virtually equated. They appeared as two names, one philosophical, the other theological, for ultimate reality. The ultimate or unconditional element, according to Tillich, is the “supporting ground in every thing (Ding)”. It is the very root and seriousness, the unfathomable depth and holiness in all conditioned actual being. Its unconditioned power is “the import of its reality as distinguished from its accidental form”.88 Now, in order to illumine the distinction between the two absolutes, it is useful to address in advance another question that prompts itself, given the nearby identification of the Unconditional and God, namely: what are the implications of Tillich’s philosophical “conquest of the concept of religion” with respect to theology (taken in the literal sense of speaking about God, God-talk)? The point is: if philosophical concepts of religion carry the danger of destroying the essence of the Unconditional, then the same failure threatens the endeavour of theology with respect to God. Although Tillich’s early essay was focused on philosophy of religion, it might be relevant concerning theology even more. This must be explained.

Criticizing the conceptualization of religion for actually killing the religious essence of unconditionality, Tillich maintains on the one hand that in religious matters “all objective thinking must be strictly excluded”, since the Unconditional is no object that lies next to, above, or within other things.89 On the other hand, if anything is to be said about the Unconditional, then inescapably it becomes an object in some sense. Directing oneself toward the Unconditional “is not possible … apart from objectification”.90 Clearly, such ‘objectifying’ is precisely what theology does when it speaks about God, although the nature of this objectification is not yet clear. But if there lies a problem for philosophy of religion, of inevitably damaging the Unconditional when putting it into a concept, then it is similarly problematic for theology to use theological concepts. As soon as the Unconditional is addressed or discussed theologically as God, some sort of objectification is taking place, together with duality of act and object, even though a religious act, according to Tillich, is not a special act but rather a special quality within other acts of the spirit.

That is to say, it must give these other acts a formation in which their religious quality is visible, and that formation is paradox, i.e., the simultaneous affirmation and negation of autonomous form. Religious thinking – and intuitive perception is thus a mode of thinking – is a ‘perceiving’ (Anschauen) in which the autonomous forms of thought and intuition are simultaneously employed and shattered. The same holds true for the moral and social forms.91.

When religion and theology want to make statements concerning the Unconditional/ God, they too cannot refrain from objectification. In order to say anything at

89 What Is Religion, 140f; see also 146 (383): “Protest against objectification is the pulse beat of religion”.
90 What Is Religion, 141.
91 What Is Religion, 144 (GW I, 381).
all, Tillich observes that religion and theology “must objectify” (italics ff). But when they do, the words and images used, form “paradoxical concepts” (italics ff). They must at the same time be affirmed and negated, similar to the use of symbols (next section). Tillich gives, among others, the example of the religious idea of “inspiration” which he determines as knowing or knowledge obtained in the presence of the Unconditional. But if the word inspiration is taken literally as the objective account of a “supernatural transmission of knowledge”, it becomes a “plain contradiction”. Then the paradox is replaced by (supposedly objective) supernaturalism which is “the attempt to make a conditioned reality unconditional”. For now, the conclusion can be drawn that Tillich’s attempt to overcome the spirit of philosophical conceptualization of religion is even more relevant to theology and religion themselves, for the simple reason that it is their very business to interact with and in a certain sense objectify the Unconditional as well as God.

The problem at stake can be summarized as follows. Philosophical and theological concepts of religion, as well as all assertions with respect to the Unconditional or God, objectify to some extent what essentially stands beyond the subject-object split, and therefore cannot really become an object of conceptualization. The solution Tillich found in his essay in 1922 was that all statements about the Unconditional/ God are necessarily paradoxical, affirming and to some extent also denying what they proclaim. Tillich designated these statements as “paradoxical concepts” that lose their meaning when construed objectively. But they are justified in opening up the ultimate ground that precedes all subject-object reality, as long as all philosophical or religious conceptualization “sees through its own dialectic and gives all honour to the Unconditional”. With respect to theology, he would soon find a different name for these paradoxical concepts which brings us to Tillich’s understanding of symbols and symbolic language. It is only with help of his concept of ‘symbol’ that the distinction between the Unconditional and God can be illumined.

8.1.1.e. Religion speaks through symbols

In “The nature of religious language” (1955) Tillich defines the character of religious language or god-talk no longer as ‘paradoxical’ but as symbolic. Clearly, it is not my intention to give a full account of the development of Tillich’s concept and

92 What Is Religion, 144: “In the presence of the Unconditional, knowing is inspiration, intuitive perception is mystery, acting is grace, and community is the kingdom of God”. All these theological notions are “paradoxical concepts, i.e., concepts that immediately lose their meaning when construed objectively”. What they literally say must at the same time be denied.

93 See What Is Religion, 122f (GW I, 367), when Tillich states right at the outset of his essay that “paradox is as necessary to every assertion as consistency is to every empirical scientific assertion: the point at which the Unconditional becomes an Object. The fact that it becomes an object is indeed the primal paradox, since by its nature the Unconditional stands beyond the antithesis of subject and object. Thus, every statement about the Unconditional is necessarily in the form of paradox”.

94 What Is Religion, 144.


96 Citation from Theology of Culture, containing Tillich’s article I take as point of departure: “The nature of religious language”. The paper was originally published as “Religious Symbols and Our Knowledge of God” in: The Christian Scholar (New York), Vol. 38, no. 3, 1955, 189-197. It is also enclosed in GW V, 213-222 as “Das Wesen der religiösen Sprache".
use of symbol. Nevertheless, a brief sketch of its final stage in the 1950s (when his main work *Systematic Theology* also appeared) must be given in order to enlighten the relationship between the designations ‘Unconditional’ and ‘God’. The significant point is not so much the uniqueness of Tillich’s doctrine of symbolism as such: an in many respects similar concept of symbol has been offered by others, like for instance Ricoeur. But the remarkable fact that Tillich identifies the notion ‘God’ itself (!) as symbol. This definite and far-reaching point is not sufficiently noticed by many who study the work of Tillich. Therefore, I will briefly describe Tillich’s understanding of symbolism in general, thereby concentrate on the symbol “God”. In particular

8.1.1.e.1. Hermeneutic power of symbols

Largely, the role that was given in “The Conquest” to paradoxical concepts (8.1.1.d), is maintained in Tillich’s doctrine of what are symbols. That we must objec-

97 tify in order to say anything at all with respect to the Unconditional, is restated in the sense that in relationship to the ultimate we must symbolize. Symbols, according to Tillich, must be distinguished from signs. Both notions point beyond themselves, but the difference is that symbols participate in the meaning and power of what they sym-

98 bolise and signs do not. Signs have no inner bond with the reality they refer to, they only express the meaning that is attached to them, simply denoting something that is known or agreed upon. But certain words (or things or acts) can become more than this, they can get connotations and gain a meaning which goes further than a given something to which they refer as signs. In such a case they become symbols with the capacity of “opening up … levels of reality which otherwise are hidden and cannot be grasped in any other way”. The disclosing, revelatory power of symbolism signifies a hermeneutic function which is exclusive and indispensable. In discussion with others, Tillich even stated that symbolic language is “the only way in which religion can express itself directly”. Apart from this “direct” form of theological statement through symbols and myths, religion can also express itself in theological, philosophical, and artistic terms, which Tillich designated as “indirectly and reflectively”. Artistic ex-

97 For a brief survey of Tillich’s understanding of symbol, see Schüßler & Sturm, *Paul Tillich, Leben, Werk, Wirkung*, 47-52; also: Schüßler, *Paul Tillich* (Beck’sche Reihe 540), 55-67. For a critical discussion of Tillich’s concept of symbol by various colleagues, see Hook, (ed.), *Religious Experience and Truth*, especially the contributions in part I (pp. 3-89). The book contains the proceedings of a New York University Institute of Philosophy meeting in 1960, including Tillich’s original paper “The religious symbol” (“Das Religiöse Symbol” 1928), enclosed as appendix (p. 301-321), to which the contributors were asked to react.

98 See Jansen, *Talen naar God*, 196, pointing to the close affinity and similar importance attached to symbolic language, both by Tillich and Ricoeur. For Ricoeur’s doctrine of symbol, see: *Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* 2004 (the French original dates from 1969).

99 *Theology of Culture*, 61.

100 O.c., 54.

101 O.c., 55; unfortunately, according to Tillich, the term ‘symbol’ has been wrongly usurped by the mathematician, which makes the confusion between sign and symbol almost irreversible.


103 See Hook (ed.), *Religious Experience and Truth*, 3 (Italics fn). Tillich’s distinction of different types of theological or religious statements as direct (through symbols) and indirect (through metaphysical theology/philosophy or art) is a remarkable variation to Schleiermacher’s types of theological lan-

104 guage. For Schleiermacher the direct theological language consists of descriptions of human states of experience, over against which he considered as secondary and tertiary all conceptions of God’s attributes and actions; and the descriptions of worldly affairs (see *The Christian Faith*, § 30 (main thesis),
pressions, too, can have a revealing or mediating power of expression that cannot be reached by other means.\textsuperscript{104} Symbols do not only participate in what they symbolize, they also take hold of those that so to speak ‘read’ the symbols and feel their appeal. Every symbol, says Tillich, is “two-edged”. They not only open up levels of reality outside of us, they also disclose levels of our soul, that is of “our interior reality”. This is not a mechanistic or unfailing procedure since not all people are opened up by the same sort of symbolism.\textsuperscript{105} Symbols come into being from the womb which is called “group unconscious” or “collective unconscious”. Some word or thing or image obtains symbolic and expressive power if something within the unconscious of a group is opened up by it; if the group says “yes” to it. In this way, symbols can be born just as they can fade or die.\textsuperscript{106}

### 8.1.1.e.II The basic religious symbol: God

What is special about religious symbols is that they open up the hidden level of ultimate reality within actual existence, they symbolize and evoke the “depth dimension of reality itself”.\textsuperscript{107} And the basic exemplar of religious symbols, according to Tillich “would be God himself”.\textsuperscript{108}

A substantial development and shift in conceptualization has taken place since “The Conquest …” of 1922. Then, the Unconditional and God were more or less equated.\textsuperscript{109} Now, ‘God’ has become the main symbol of what is no longer designated specifically as “the Unconditional” (\textit{das Unbedingte}). This more definite sounding terminology is largely abandoned. The capital letter has disappeared in English, and so has the determining article “the”. Any idea of objectifying or arguing about the unconditional as \textit{a} being, or a highest thing must be evaded. Thus, “the Unconditional” has become “something unconditional” (\textit{etwas Unbedingtes}) or “the unconditional element” (\textit{das unbedingte Element}).\textsuperscript{110} Moreover, the notion “unconditional” is less frequently used, and replaced or flanked by many other more or less equivalent designations of ultimate reality.\textsuperscript{111} Thus, religious symbols are said to disclose the “depth dimension” of reality itself being “the ground of every other dimension and every other depth”. Symbols open up the “fundamental level … below all other levels”, namely the level of “being itself”, the “ultimate

\begin{itemize}
\item discussed above in 1.2, introductory remarks).
\item \textsuperscript{104} \textit{Theology of Culture}, 57; Tillich gives the example of a landscape of Rubens mediating an experience that you cannot have in any other way than through this painting made by Rubens.
\item \textsuperscript{105} O.c., 57.
\item \textsuperscript{106} O.c., 58. As example of succumbing power of symbolic expression in the Protestant sphere, Tillich mentions the symbolic meaning connected to Mary, the mother of Jesus, as Holy Virgin. As a symbol of mediation between the believer and God, the Holy Virgin Mary has died to the Protestant mind, emphasizing the special and direct relationship to God, restored by Christ only, see o.c., 65.
\item \textsuperscript{107} O.c., 59.
\item \textsuperscript{108} O.c., 61 (“\textit{Das Wesen der religiösen Sprache}”, in: \textit{GW} V 213-222, 218: \textit{Ihr} (namely of the transcendent type of religious symbols) \textit{grundlegendes Symbol ist das Wort “Gott”}).
\item \textsuperscript{109} So in: \textit{What Is Religion}, 124, 125; also remarked by Weischedel, \textit{Der Gott der Philosophen} II, 91: “Denn der Begriff des Unbedingten wird dem Gottes gleichgesetzt”.
\item \textsuperscript{110} See e.g., \textit{ST} I, 206 (242); and \textit{ST} I, 12: here (in the introduction to his main work in 1951) Tillich ties closely to one another, to the extent of identification: that which is ultimate and the human attitude of ultimate concern. That which is ultimate, says Tillich, “is a matter of infinite passion and interest … making us its object whenever we try to make it our object. For this reason we have avoided terms like ’the ultimate’, ’the unconditioned’, ‘the universal’, ‘the infinite’, and have spoken of ultimate, unconditional, total, infinite concern”.
\item \textsuperscript{111} The various distinctions of religious reality (following in the main text) all appear within the confines of one single page, which illustrates the ease of Tillichian definition, \textit{Theology of Culture}, 59.
\end{itemize}
power of being”. This “ultimate ground of being”, also called one’s own “ultimate ground and meaning”, is further equated with “the Holy” which is the “dimension of ultimate reality” or just “the ultimate”. Thus, says Tillich, religious symbols symbolize and therefore participate in the Holy. Simultaneously, the Holy, being “wholly transcendent”, transcends all of its symbols, since participation does not mean that the Holy and its symbols can be identified. Now, apart from the stunning variety of designations for what was earlier called ‘the Unconditional’, the remarkable point is that God is no longer simply equated with unconditional, ultimate reality. God cannot even be identified with the Holy, since he is now put forward by Tillich as its primary symbol.

When the word God itself (or God himself) is seen as the basic symbol of the Holy, that is, of the unconditional element within all existence, then it seems that the concept or symbol God is not seen as equal but even as secondary in relation to this unconditional or holy element. According to Weischedel it implies that the concept of ultimate or unconditional reality has priority (Vorrang) to that of God. However, the symbol or word ‘God’, is a special one according to Tillich since it contains two elements to be acknowledged, a symbolic and a non-symbolic element. Firstly there is the non-symbolic element in the word ‘God’, meaning that “he is ultimate reality, being itself, ground of being, power of being”. In this respect, awareness of God as awareness of something unconditional “is in itself what it is, is not symbolic”.

This seems to provide us with the only non-symbolic statement about God: “The statement that God is being-itself is a non-symbolic statement. It does not point beyond itself. It means what it says directly and properly; if we speak of the actuality of God, we first assert that he is not God if he is not being-itself” (ST I, 238f (277)). Behind this statement in the first volume of his main work a controversy is hiding, outlined by Warren A. Kay. In an early article “Das religiöse Symbol” (1928) which appeared in English translation in Journal of Liberal Religion 2 (1940), 13-33, Tillich had written that “all knowledge of God has a symbolic character” (JoLR, 28). Criticism was raised against this seeming “pan-symbolism” by Wilbur M. Urban in the same volume of JoLR, 35, stating that symbolism remains meaningless if it is entirely unrelated...

112 What Is Religion, 143, where the “function of unconditionality” is equated with “the quality of holliness”. This means that the holy, according to Tillich, is not an extra or new value, supposedly introduced by religion into the system of values. Far from being a special quality supplied for by theology, “the Holy is rather that which gives the values their value, the [un]conditionality of their validity and the absoluteness of their relation to reality” (= GW I, 381: “Es gibt keine Heiligkeitswerte, sondern das Heilige ist das, was den Werten den Wert gibt, die Unbedingtheit ihres Geltens, die Absolutheit ihrer Realitätsbeziehung”).


116 O.c., 61.

117 Kay, Paul Tillich’s Hermeneutic of Religious Symbols, 58f.
to non-symbolic knowledge. Now, according to Kay, the passage just cited from ST I, shows that Tillich at that moment accepted Urban’s point of “the necessity of at least one statement about God being non-symbolic” (Kay, 59). But Tillich modified this position again in the second volume of Systematic Theology (1957). He then seems to return to his original position of “Das religiöse Symbol”, witness ST II.9 (15f): “everything religion has to say about God … has a symbolic character”, only with the exception of the statement itself. Thus, “that everything we say about God is symbolic” is now, according to Tillich, “an assertion about God which itself is not symbolic” (STII,9). But this, according to Kay, is hardly different from the original position that Urban had criticized (Kay, 59). Tillich’s article “The nature of religious language” (1955) that I have taken as point of departure, appeared in the midst of these developments. It seems to combine the one position, namely that all theology is symbolic language, with the other: that there is one non-symbolic exception, namely that God is “being itself, ground of being, power of being”.

It occurs to me that in this one non-symbolic statement, Tillich actually uses the word ‘God’ as a sign, namely, to indicate unconditional, ultimate reality, being itself. But religion intends to come into contact with the ultimate reality the word God refers to. This asks for a second function and meaning of the word God. If we are embryonic believers that actually and spiritually want to cope with the unconditional element in our existence, we must in some way objectify. This means that

in our relationship to this ultimate we symbolize and must symbolize. We could not be in communication with God if he were only “ultimate being”. But in our relationship to him we encounter him with the highest of what we ourselves are, person. And so in the symbolic form of speaking about him, we have both that which transcends infinitely our experience of ourselves as persons, and that which is so adequate to our being persons that we can say, “Thou” to God and can pray to him.118

The concept ‘God’, a personal God, is thus the highest possible symbol through which we are enabled to converse or associate with what is non-symbolical about him, and thus, what is represented by him as symbol, namely the ultimate or holy essence of unconditional reality. The point is: with what is unconditional, with being itself, no subject-object relationship is possible. Therefore, we need the revealing mediation through the symbol ‘God as a person’.119 But if we would go as far as envisioning God entirely and exclusively as a person, taking the symbol literally, and ontologically claim God to be an existing person as in straight theism,120 the consequence would be, according to Tillich, that “we lose the element of the divine”. We would fail “the unconditional which transcends subject and object and all other polarities”.121 I conclude that, apparently, the notion God is used in two meanings, one non-symbolic, to the extent that ultimate reality or being itself can be designated as or referred to with the word or ‘sign’ God. The second meaning is that God is also (the name for) the symbolic personal Deity worshipped by believers, e.g., the one Christians speak to in

118 Theology of Culture, 61f.
119 See also: ST I, 244 (283): “The symbol ‘personal God’ is absolutely fundamental, because an existential relation is a person-to-person relation”.
120 This is, according to Tillich, what ordinary theism has done, see ST I, 245: it “has made God a heavenly, completely perfect person who resides above the world and mankind. The protest of atheism against such a highest person is correct. There is no evidence for his existence …”.
121 Theology of Culture, 62.
their prayers as God, our Father; or the one Muslims address as Allah. Below, I will discuss the ambiguity of this double use of the word ‘God’ and some of its collateral confusion.

8.1.1.e.III. Further or secondary symbols

Elaborating his concept of symbol, Tillich distinguishes two further types of symbols referring to the realm of transcendent ultimate reality that are actually elaborations of the main symbol of ‘God as a person’. These are the qualities or attributes of God, such as his love and mercy, his mighty power and omnipresence on the one hand; and on the other hand the acts of God as, e.g., his creating the world or when we say that God has sent his son. This entire representation of ultimate reality in the form of a living and active divine person, God, with preferences and qualities, becomes absurd according to Tillich if we use it in a literal sense. But if taken symbolically, all these references to God as a person, as loving and powerful, creative, helpful, demanding, and so on, are deep expressions of the relationship between God and humans in the Christian experience. Although this is said by Tillich primarily with respect to the symbol of God’s mission of his son, it is valid with respect to all symbolic use of phenomena taken from experienced reality, in the long history of religions. The overall picture may seem chaotic but the key to understand the practically endless variety of religious symbolism is

that everything in reality can impress itself as a symbol for a special relationship of the human mind to its own ultimate ground and meaning. So, in order to open up the seemingly closed door to this chaos of religious symbols, one simply has to ask, ‘What is the relationship to the ultimate which is symbolized in these symbols?’.

Interpreted in this way, the many and various religious symbols become “the most revealing creations of the human mind” with great and lasting power over human consciousness and unconsciousness. In the closing section of Systematic Theology I, Tillich gives an empathic illustration of two complementary kinds of experience or relationship that humans can have with ultimate reality, one feeling small and feeble, the other feeling safe and secure, expressed respectively through the symbols of God as Lord and as Father.

In my view, the central and most arresting element in Tillich’s concept of symbol is not that theology does talk about God in symbols which is commonly accepted. But major and universal as he is, ‘God’ himself is defined by Tillich as symbol. God as the highest person, as the personal deity or God individual, is the principal religious symbol, the main representation of ultimate, unconditional reality. Actually, this is a very far-reaching and extraordinary challenging idea which, if I see it correctly, has not sufficiently been noticed in the discussions about it.

122 O.c., 63: the confession that God has sent his son, if taken symbolically, “is a profound expression, the ultimate Christian expression, of the relationship between God and man in the Christian experience”.
123 O.c., 59f.
124 O.c., 60.
125 ST I, 286-289 (329-332).
126 See Theology of Culture, 61: God or: the image of a highest being of the highest perfection “means we have a symbol for that which is not symbolic in the idea of God – namely, ‘Being Itself’”.
127 A near exception might be Arne Jonges, in his contribution “Begrijpen” in Benjamin’s, Offringa & Slob
Unfortunately, Tillich himself was the first to water down his own radical theory of symbolism, in reaction to the early criticism by Wilbur M. Urban, referred to above. Urban demanded at least one non-symbolic statement about God, but this demand is in clear contradiction with the core element of Tillich’s theory that symbols reveal what cannot be found or grasped otherwise. Nevertheless, Tillich politely gave in to Urban, while later (in ST II) half-and-half retracing his steps on this point.\textsuperscript{128} But Tillich’s concept attributing to symbols a divining or revealing function which is exclusive, was targeted by many other critics\textsuperscript{129}, some of whom I will briefly discuss.

According to William P. Alston, a believer making use of religious symbols should “be capable of specifying the symbolizandum … in nonsymbolic language” (13).\textsuperscript{130} A system of cohering symbols “must at some point yield implications concerning experienceable states of affairs”. Thus, what Alston asks for is “an effective identification of the symbolizandum” which need not necessarily be a genuine “empirical test”, but it does require “the background of a complex system of beliefs about supernatural beings, a system which furnishes the material for the requisite identifications of symbolizanda” (14). In other words, according to Alston, a symbol derives its meaning from its theological context.

Wondering why symbolism is such a favorite subject in the philosophy of his time, Brand Blanshard holds that the hermeneutic power of symbols is strongly overestimated. He especially questions Tillich’s belief that symbols can function as a “bridge between finite and infinite”. Thereby, he refers to Tillich’s own identification of God as “the unconditioned transcendent who surpasses every possible conception of being, including even the conception of a Supreme Being”.\textsuperscript{131} Blanshard fully agrees that “infinity exceeds the grasp of finite thought”. Therefore, he states that a religious symbol “never reaches the object, never apprehends it as it really is”, since it refers to what is “beyond all thought” and “wholly incomprehensible” (52). Thus, Tillich’s high idea of the hermeneutic power of symbol is thoroughly demeaned through his own notion of the unconditioned transcendent. Still, Blanshard does not reckon Tillich among those who see God as “discontinuous absolutely with human reason”. Instead, he assumes hypothetically that, if religious revelation were to present a symbolic picture to Tillich in which God would appear as “the most absurd of beings” (Kierkegaard), making entirely irrational demands on believers (53), then Blanshard would expect Tillich to measure revelation by reason, not reason by revelation (53f).\textsuperscript{132} If correct, again, this would undermine the claimed exclusiveness of the hermeneutic potential of symbols, to the extent that all symbolic instruction, even when resulting from direct revelation, can be or should be overruled by reason. divines

In a paper which is not unfriendly but without much philosophic-epistemic affinity, Sidney

\textsuperscript{128} See the account of this discussion by Warren A. Kay, referred to above (in 8.1.1.e.ii); see also Kegley, The theology of Paul Tillich, 1982 (1952), 379, for Tillich’s reaction to Urban: “An early criticism by Professor Urban of Yale forced me to acknowledge that in order to speak of symbolic knowledge one must delimit the symbolic realm by an unsymbolic statement. I was grateful for this criticism and under its impact I became suspicious of any attempts to make the concept of symbol all-embracing and therefore meaningless.”

\textsuperscript{129} See Hook (ed.), Religious Experience and Truth with critical reactions and comments to Tillich’s original paper “The Religious Symbol” (1928), enclosed in the book.


\textsuperscript{132} Blanshard mentions the example of the irrational or absurd demand put on Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. For Kierkegaard, this godly claim, implying what he called an example of ‘teleological suspension of ethics’, represented the epitome of divinity.
Hook struggles with Tillich’s double meaning of the word “God”. Thus, Hook observes on one moment that for Tillich “God is not Yahweh, Baal, Zeus or Odin but what all beings of ultimate concern have in common” (60), thus emphasizing Tillich’s first meaning of God as the one non-symbolic word (or sign) for ultimate reality (the unconditioned transcendent). Thereupon Hook observes that according to Tillich, God can only be known through religious symbols that “can in no way be judged by any ontological fact but only by human experience” (61). Hook even wonders rhetorically, “why do we require the ontological reference at all?”

According to him “the whole of ontology with its vocabulary of Being is an unnecessary intellectual construction which adds not a whit to our understanding of the world or to religious experience” (61). It seems that Hook stood not unsympathetic towards Tillich as a person, but one can hardly imagine a perspective farther removed from Tillich’s than his. For Tillich, the considerate analysis of being is not just a “word game of classical ontology” (61), as Hook puts it sneeringly. Instead, it forms the basis of his entire theology. For Tillich, the point of departure is being itself, the unconditional transcendent. Addressing this ground of all being can only take place through symbols, especially through the main religious symbol God. I will try to elucidate the confusion.

When God is identified as the basic symbol of ultimate reality, then God cannot also (or only equivocally) be equated with what he symbolizes. If we take God, with Tillich, as the symbolic highest person then we implicitly say that God is not coming first. As a symbol, God whom Jesus called ‘our Father’, is not the ontological point of departure. Instead, as was well seen by Weischedel, priority lies with ultimate reality. Thus, the unknown ‘subject’ that is the primary goal for religion to divine and experience, is being itself. But addressing this ultimate ‘subject’, or spiritually reaching out to it, requires special semantic means since the aimed ‘subject’ lies beyond the subject-object sphere of existence. This is where the hermeneutic tool of symbolism comes in. The word God, God as the symbolic highest person, can help religiously inclined humans to get in touch with, experience, and participate in the unconditional element in their existence. Being itself can be approached with aid of the symbol God, that is, through the highest divine Person as worshipped and revered within one or other religion.

Now, for theological and religious thinking, as well as for serious study of religion, it appears as nearly impossible to maintain this order of ranking, in which “God” who is, religiously speaking, beginning and end of all meaning and being, is nevertheless made subservient to what is metaphysically declared as coming first. For committed theologians, as well as for philosophers of religion, not to speak of sincere believers, it feels as a matter of course that God comes first as the aimed object of investigation or of worship. And it only seems natural that religion speaks in symbols illuminating what and who God is. But if God himself is recast as the major symbol representing something else, something really ultimate, then this is felt as a degrading of God to the second plan.

Even a specialist like Schüßler, who is profoundly versed in Tillich’s oeuvre, seems to have difficulty with it. Thus, Schüßler makes perfectly clear in a succinct passage that in Tillich’s perspective we need symbols to reveal the “depth-dimension of reality itself” which is the “layer of being itself” (die Schicht des Sein-Selbst); adding that for Tillich the word “God” is

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134 See Tillich’s own contribution “The Religious Symbol”, enclosed as appendix in the same bundle, 301-321, esp. 315: “But the word “God” involves a double meaning: it connotes the unconditioned transcendent, the ultimate, and also an object somehow endowed with qualities and actions. The first is not figurative or symbolic but is rather in the strictest sense what it is said to be. The second, however, is really symbolic, figurative. It is the second that is the object envisaged by the religious consciousness” (= “Das religiöse Symbol” (1928), enclosed in: GW V, 196-212, 207).
135 See Tillich, My Search for Absolutes, 127f: “The encounter of man with ultimate reality, which we call the encounter with the holy … is the experience of the Absolute, of absoluteness as such. Only after this statement has been made can one speak of a particular encounter with the holy – that is, of ‘religion’ in the traditional sense of the word”.
the basic symbol (das Grundlegende Symbol):\textsuperscript{136} God being secondary to being itself. But in a following passage the perspective is turned from ‘being itself’ towards God. The primary or aimed ‘subject’ to explore is now the content of our concept of God itself (unsere Gottesvorstellung). The unconditional element now appears as part of, or as an element within our concept of God.\textsuperscript{137} Thus, in the first case the revealing symbol ‘God’ is subservient to the unconditional element within all reality. In the second case, the unconditional element is part of our God-concept, that is, of God whom we, in so far as being Christian believers (or Muslims, Jews …) treasure and worship. To the extent that I focus more narrowly on God as a personal God individual, I tend to forget that God is a symbol. And to that same extent, I’d be likely to demand for his existence, as all theists tend to do.

Part of the ambiguity lies in Tillich’s own equivocal use of the word God, on the one hand, as synonymous to, actually even as a sign (!) for the unconditional; on the other hand his identification of ‘God’ as the most basic, revealing symbol of the very same unconditional element. This double use of the word “God” leads to puzzling statements like “God is the symbol for God”; and it seems to enable Tillich to obliterate the possibility of atheism when stating:

\begin{quote}
In any case, he who denies God (1. as symbol) as a matter of ultimate concern, affirms God (2. as sign), because he affirms ultimacy in his concern\textsuperscript{138}.
\end{quote}

In the first line, God (1) refers to the symbol God, as e.g., the biblical picture of a personal God, referred to by Jesus as ‘our Father in Heaven’. An ardent atheist for whom the God of the bible is no matter of ultimate concern denies this God (1), but when doing so, says Tillich, he actually affirms God (2). He affirms God in this second sense as far as God is simply the sign/word for unconditionality, witness the ultimacy or passion in his concern, the seriousness of his denial. But this second God (2), so ardently advocated by the atheist, cannot simply be equated with the religious and symbolic God (1) of the bible - which Tillich tacitly seems to suggest. Likewise, stating that “God is the symbol for God” is a needlessly puzzling way of saying that the God (1) of, say, the Christians, is for them the main symbol of absolute reality (2), and thus of their ultimate concern.\textsuperscript{139} The ambiguity that is annex with Tillich’s double identification of God (as both synonymous with unconditional reality and as its major religious symbol) stands not on its own within Tillich’s theology. From a different point of view, this is well seen by Schüßler when stating that Tillich’s entire theology can be characterized as a half-way demythologization (halbe Entmythologisierung).\textsuperscript{140}

\subsection*{8.1.2 The unconditional/divine element within all being}

The relationship between the unconditional element and its corresponding symbol God on the one hand, and everything conditioned on the other, more specifically, the meaning and intercession of the unconditional ground/God in human existence and human beings, can be approached either ontologically or theologically. The ontological perspective concerns what the unconditional element means to the realm of the conditioned in general, and in a more materially empowering sense, namely as ‘ground’ or ‘power’ of being. It concerns primarily the founding and forming impact

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{137} Schüßler & Sturm, o.c., 49.
\textsuperscript{138} \textit{Dynamics of Faith}, 46 (GW VIII, 142): the explanatory additions 1. and 2. are mine (fo).
\textsuperscript{139} Tillich’s equivocal use of ‘God’ is even more obvious in German translation, see GW VIII, 142: „Auf jeden Fall gilt, dass, wer Gott (1) mit unbedingter Leidenschaft leugnet, Gott (2) bejaht, weil er etwas Unbedingtes bekundet”.\textsuperscript{140} Schüßler & Sturm, o.c., 51. The expression was used by Tillich himself with respect to the form “transition from essence to existence” as interpretation of the symbol of the fall, see below 8.2.2.
\end{flushleft}

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of the unconditional element towards or within existence at large. On the human side this is mirrored in a basic and metaphysically oriented, religious attitude. Seen in this way, religion as the human awareness of and response to the unconditional element that carries us, appears so to speak as an ontological reflex from the human side. This was formally designated by Tillich in his earlier years as ‘directedness towards the Unconditional’. \(^{141}\) Later, it became more famously known as unconditional or “ultimate concern” which I will describe firstly (8.1.2.a Ultimate concern as the human reflex to the Unconditional).

In the explicitly religious or theological approach, the unconditional element is addressed as God. Theology asks in particular for the quality of unconditionality as it is approached and as it comes to explicit awareness through the symbol ‘God’. Thus it asks for the nature of God’s unconditionality as related to the conditioned, in particular to human existence. The unconditional God is not only that which carries us, or the One who carries us. He can also surprise, transform, or even strike us. Theologically, Tillich referred to this unconditional character that is the essence of God’s active relationship towards humanity as the Protestant principle, which I will discuss in the second part of this subparagraph (8.1.2.b The Protestant principle). Clearly, God’s unconditional work and its divine nature, together with the responding ultimate concern on the side of humans, may lead to a practical-religious transformation of existence, namely the realization and evocation of what Tillich calls “new being” and human participation in it. This I will discuss in 8.3 Human potential.

**8.1.2.a. Ultimate concern as the human reflex to the unconditional**

*(mystical apriori)*

With his presupposition of the unconditional element *(das Unbedingte)* as the ultimate basis of everything conditioned, Tillich claimed to have supplied for the absolute foundation of all relative meaning and being (see 8.1.1.c). As we have seen, he referred to his original notion of absolute reality with many names (8.1.1.e.ii). Before examining the ontological-religious effect or import of the unconditional element within the subject-object sphere of existence, it is useful to discuss briefly some examples of criticism that were raised against Tillich’s presupposed ontology, especially against his idea of a foundational ‘absolute’ carrying the whole building of meaning-reality.

Discussing Tillichean theology as a possible example of “philosophical theology, Weischedel criticized Tillich’s matter of fact-like assumption of absolute meaning as real. Weischedel did admit though, that if one wants to speak sensibly about meaning, one should adopt unconditional, absolute meaning to carry it.\(^{142}\) But this is no proof yet that there actually is any meaning at all. Reality might, according to Weischedel, equally well prove to be entirely devoid of meaning, notwithstanding all human endeavour to create it. Therefore, although he conditionally and theoretically, did accept Tillich’s ‘foundationalism’ himself, Weischedel

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\(^{141}\) Note that Tillich used the same wording with respect to religion and metaphysics: *What is Religion, 35 (= Religionsphilosophie, in GW I, 302): “For metaphysics is … a religious attitude. It is directedness toward the Unconditional (Metaphysik ist … Richtung auf das Unbedingte). In System der Wissenschaften, in GW I, 228, he expressed himself similarly with respect to Religion as an inner attitude within all spheres of meaning, namely the directedness toward the Unconditional (“Die unmittelbare Richtung auf das Unbedingte”).

\(^{142}\) Weischedel II, 89: “In der Tat würde sich das einzelne als sinnhaft Erscheinende als sinnlos darstellen, wenn es nicht in einem unbedingten Sinn gehalten würde. Und dies gilt für das Phänomen des Sinnes, unabhängig davon, ob man einen solchen unbedingten Sinn als wirklich setzt oder verwirft”.

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nevertheless rejected the validity of Tillich’s theological philosophy to the extent that it depends on the undisputed and unproven presupposition, namely that reality is meaningful.143

The Dutch philosopher of religion Wessel Stoker questions the plausibility of foundationalism altogether.144 Rhetorically asking “can the postulate of the unconditional function as an objective given in epistemology?”, Stoker observed that Kant, already, had refrained from such metaphysical foundation to the extent that he based scientific knowledge of outer phenomena in the “transcendental subject”. Heidegger took as starting point and origin from where scientific knowledge is derived: the “life world of human beings”.145 Stoker has also referred to postmodern reservations with respect to absolute legitimization and justification. Instead of being firmly based upon an absolute foundation, knowledge and truth in postmodern culture are tied to a certain context with a corresponding set of rules and standards that are valid as within a specific game.146 Stoker’s observations come close to made by Alston (8.1.1.e.iii).

Objections as to the validity of Tillich’s ontological fundament were also raised by Adrian Thatcher, relating Tillich’s foundationalism to his discussion of the so called ontological argument, ambiguous (78).147 Tillich clearly rejects the ontological argument as argument or proof of the existence of God but he has no problem, as Thatcher emphasizes, accepting “the ontological argument’s passage from thinking to existence” (79). Explaining this last statement further, Thatcher observes that Tillich “accepts that ‘than which a greater cannot be conceived’ must stand outside the mind” (79). Tillich is following the Augustinian tradition in which divine existence is seen as part of its essence. This implies, says Thatcher, that “God’s essence is the guarantor of his existence, provided of course we do not understand by ‘God’ anything more than ‘something unconditional’, not the Supreme Being of orthodox theism” (79). But Tillich does accept as valid, says Thatcher, “the reasoning of the ontological argument which a majority of theologians and philosophers dismiss as faulty”, namely the passage from thinking to existence. He only rejects its claimed result, namely an existing highest being, identified with the Christian God (79).148 According to Thatcher, Tillich’s continued use of the argument is following the form it took in German idealism, with Hegel and Schelling. Both philosophers argue from the notion or concept of a ‘thing’ to its existence. Even the later Schelling did so, though claiming otherwise in his positive philosophy. In his “Berlin Lectures” Schelling emphasized that one “cannot start from the concept of God in order to prove God’s existence”. Therefore, he took as point of departure the concept of “the unquestionably existing” (das unzweifelhaft Bestehende). In doing so, Thatcher points out, Schelling is actually leaning on the cosmological type of arguing, namely “that for something to exist contingently, something else must

143 Weischedel II, 90: “So steht Tillichs Denken von vornherein unter einer unausgewiesenen Voraussetzung: daß nämlich die Wirklichkeit sinnhaft sei”; 92: „Die Sinnhaftigkeit alles Wirklichen wird allzu selbstverständlich vorausgesetzt“.


146 Stoker, Is vragen naar zin ..., 96f.; also 97, where Stoker speaks of the “impossibility of an all-encompassing justificiation” of meaning.

147 References in the small letter text refer to: Thatcher, The ontology of Paul Tillich. For Tillich’s own discussion of the argument, ST I, 204ff (238ff); also: “The two types of Philosophy of Religion”, in Theology of Culture, 10-29, esp 15ff.

148 Thatcher seems to equate ‘existence’ with ‘standing outside the mind’. But this identification proves inadequate and confusing. Contrary to his suggestion, Tillich too rejects the passage from thinking to existing (see his Theology of Culture, 15), but holds on to the idea that thinking inevitably points to a presupposed or implied absolute, that as ‘something unconditional’ transcends the mind. Actually, Tillich thinks his absolute indeed as standing outside the mind but also, and simultaneously, as present within the mind. In both ways ‘something unconditional’ is ontologically preceding the mind. See also below 9.1.2.a.i.
exist necessarily" (Thatcher, 82). For Schelling, says Thatcher, it is unthinkable that God (“the unquestionably existing”) does not exist, but this “tells us more about Schelling’s thought than it does about God’s existence” (83). Likewise, Thatcher wonders that “Tillich never doubts whether his term Being really refers to anything” (80). But for Tillich, being (or being itself, something unconditional …) is presupposed as the essential unity between the thinker and what is thought. It represents the undoubted “prius of subject and object”.\textsuperscript{149} In other words, being according to Tillich is not something that exists, but the all-encompassing principle of existence.

Apparently, what I have designated as Tillich’s metaphysical apriori (8.1.1.c), the presupposition of unconditional being (das Unbedingte) as logically preceding and founding all subject-object conditioned reality, is far from commonly accepted. Nevertheless, Tillich did state that in order to treat its subject matter adequately, philosophy of religion should “apprehend the Unconditional within everything conditioned as grounding both itself and the conditioned” (8.1.1.a). Now, it may be conceded that the fact that the Unconditional is grounding itself is part of the presupposition in question itself. But if something unconditional as ground of all being is indeed permeating and empowering everything conditioned, then it should be possible to establish its presence through its effects, and to recognize at least something of its power and working,\textsuperscript{150} which is precisely the Tillichean perspective. That is to say that along with his metaphysical apriori, he adopted on the (subjective-)human side a mystical apriori: “an awareness of something that transcends the cleavage between subject and object”. Many philosophical concepts or cosmologies, says Tillich, are based on such “immediate experience of something ultimate in value and being of which one can become intuitively aware”.\textsuperscript{151} In his own perspective the unconditional element, the power of the ultimate within a human life, comes to the surface in a religious awareness and determination which he defines as the “state of being ultimately concerned”.\textsuperscript{152} According to him, it is even due to the unconditional element, that the religious question can occur anyway. Thus, while addressing the absolute as the infinite, he observed that

although man is actually separated from the infinite, he could not be aware of it if he did not participate in it potentially. This is expressed in the state of being ultimately concerned, a state which is universally human, whatever the content of the concern may be. This is the point at which we must speak non-symbolically about God, but in terms of a quest for him.\textsuperscript{153}

\textsuperscript{149} Thatcher, 80, referring to Tillich, “Two Types of Philosophy of Religion”, in Theology of Culture, 25.; see for Tillich’s discussion of the same subject-matter: Theology of Culture, 81.

\textsuperscript{150} In fact, this supposition resembles the traditional cosmological reasoning from cause to effect and vice versa. It is also present in Heidegger’s method, as presented above by Stoker, namely of gaining knowledge from the “life world of human beings”, in Tillich’s case with the aim of recognizing the unconditional element in everything conditioned (see intermezzo above, referring to Stoker, “Theologie en wetenschap bij PT”, in: NTT 64/4, 2010, 287).

\textsuperscript{151} ST I, 9 (16). According to Tillich, many philosophic concepts, both of naturalist- and idealist-style, take their point of departure in “a point of identity between the experiencing subject and the ultimate which appears in religious experience or in the experience of the world as ‘religious’”. He exemplifies his point with one of his shortlists of philosophers, who all seem to proceed in their thinking from an apriori which is “a type of mystical experience”, e.g. of “universal substance” (Spinoza), “identity of spirit and nature” (Schelling), “universe” (Schleiermacher), “value creating process” (Whitehead), “absolute spirit” (Hegel), “cosmic person” (Brightman).

\textsuperscript{152} Dynamics of Faith, 1 (= Wesen und Wandel des Glaubens, in: GW VIII, 111-196).

\textsuperscript{153} ST II, 9 (16: Obwohl der Mensch aktuell vom Unendlichen geschieden ist, kann er doch etwas von ihm
At least five central aspects of Tillichean theology are combined and implied in these succinct lines. They must be discussed, though not all within the present section. The notion of divine-human “separation” will be addressed in 8.2 Hamartiology; the point of potential “participation” of finite human being in infinite being in 8.3 Human Potential. My aim in the present section is, firstly, to gauge the plausibility (i) of Tillich’s foundationalism, some critics of which I have referred to already. In order to find the measure or kind of plausibility, I will readdress Tillich’s attitude towards the arguments for God and the question of the existence of God. The underlying question is in what manner, or to what extent, ‘something unconditional’ can be shown as present or working within the realm of the conditioned. Or, theologically speaking: how, where, and to what extent can something of God be recognized in ultimate human concerns? Secondly, plausibility is also at stake in face of the apparently ontological or anthropological take of religion Tillich is advocating for, in the words “universally human” (ii). The relevant question here is: what is it actually that, according to Tillich, is universally human? Thirdly and finally, if every human being is religious whatever the content of his or her ultimate concern may be (iii), then the question concerning the relationship between different examples or contents of ultimate concern must be addressed, not in the least with respect to Christian faith (and the commensurability with the New Age). All three points have bearing on the quotation in small print given above.

**8.1.2.a.i. Plausibility of unconditional reality and the argument for God**

At first sight, the way of reasoning in the quotation under discussion shows some likeness to the idealistic argumentation concerning God as unquestionably existing (8.1.2.a). As Tillich puts it, one’s awareness of being separated from the infinite presupposes at least the possibility of one’s participation in it. When such participation becomes actual, it finds expression in the state of being ultimately concerned. Now, the notion ‘ultimate concern’ contains two aspects, one of which is about content. This will be addressed below (see iii. Whatever the content). The other aspect implied is the concern, especially the conscious awareness of this concern, the plausibility of which is now under discussion. Clearly, both content and awareness are connected to the question what or who is implicitly or explicitly considered as ‘ultimate’, as ‘God’, but even this question is approached through the door of awareness.

The ontological importance of religious awareness has been discussed by Tillich in close relation to the so-called arguments for the existence of God. He regards the ontological argument as a “rational description of the relation of our mind to Being as such”. It only describes how “potential infinity is present in actual finitude”. The argument does not prove anything but analyzes the human situation of finitude, in such a way, says Tillich, that “the question of God appears as possible and necessary” (STI, 206). Thus, with respect to absolute reality, taken as the infinite, Tillich observes that the ontological argument

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wissen, weil er potentiell an ihm partizipiert. Das zeigt sich daran, daß uns etwas unbedingt angehen kann – eine allgemein menschliche Möglichkeit –, gleichgültig, was der Inhalt dieses unbedingten Anliegens ist. Hier ist der Punkt, an dem wir nicht-symbolisch über Gott reden, allerdings in der Form des Fragens nach ihm”).

154 Theology of Culture, 15.
shows that an awareness of the infinite is included in man’s awareness of finitude. Man knows that he is finite, that he is excluded from an infinity which nevertheless belongs to him. He is aware of his potential infinity while being aware of his actual finitude (…).

So far, the question of God is possible but, says Tillich, this question is also a ‘must’:

Man must ask about the infinite from which he is estranged, although it belongs to him; he must ask about that which gives him the courage to take his anxiety upon himself. And he can ask this double question because the awareness of his potential infinity is included in his awareness of his finitude.155

In one respect, the ‘must’ of asking for God appears as an existential necessity which is felt in case of threatening nonbeing.156 In this sense, the quest for God is not yet a logical necessity. But for Tillich, the quest for God is more than only possible: it has a high degree of inevitability as well, since he describes the infinite awareness as included in the awareness of finitude. Potential infinity appears to the mind while being aware of its own finitude. This suggests that the religious awareness of absolute reality (of something unconditional, God, the infinite) is a direct awareness which is immediately given with one’s sentience of actual finitude. In Tillich’s perspective, the relation of our mind to being as such - which is tantamount to the divine-human relationship – is one of direct, ontological nearness and even equality. He approvingly referred to Meister Eckhart saying that between God and the soul there is “neither strangeness nor remoteness”; that “therefore the soul is not only equal with God but it is … the same that He is”.157 Nuancing the decided matter of factness of these words by Eckhart, Tillich adds that they form “of course, a paradoxical statement …; for in order to state the identity, an element of non-identity must be presupposed”. In fact, this togetherness of identity and non-identity is of main importance to the plausibility question. According to Tillich, it is “the dynamic and critical point in the ontological approach”.158 Searching for marks of identity and non-identity, Tillich’s “rational description” discerns within our mind “principia per se nota” which have immediate evidence whenever they are noticed”, namely the so-called “transcendentalia esse, verum, bonum”. These principia are not only present within our mind but they also “constitute” the Absolute standing above our mind, preceding all duality of knowing and known.159 In this way, apparently, the unconditional or absolute element as the principle of all Being is thought as being both beyond (transcendent to) and immanent within our mind which carries an undeniable suggestion of both identity and non-identity. Tillich draws the bold conclusion that the Absolute has “absolute certainty”. But it has this certainty not as ‘something existent’, nor as someone or somebody but as the principle of being. Only in this sense - as principle, not as outer existence! - the

155 ST I, 206 (240).
156 ST I, 208 (243); this searching for God, to which humans can be forced by nonbeing, in order to regain the courage to conquer it, is discussed by Tillich in connection with the cosmological and teleological arguments.
157 Theology of Culture, 14f.
158 O.c., 15.
159 O.c., 15: the principia implied in our mind, the transcendentalia, esse, verum, bonum “constitute the Absolute in which the difference between knowing and known is not actual”.

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Absolute is said to be “a necessary thought because it is the presupposition of all thought”. On this basis, Tillich can state that in the ontological perspective, a human being “is immediately aware of something unconditional …”, implying “immediate religious certainty”.

In reaction to the criticism forwarded by Thatcher (see above, 8.1.2.a) two things must be observed. Firstly, that this ‘certainty’ is meant by Tillich to remain within the realm of thinking and mind. In no way does it provide for objective certainty outside the mind in terms of empirical, outer existence. And, secondly, even within the mind, Tillich acknowledged that it is the weakness, the nerve of the ontological argument that the human mind “is able to turn away from what is nearest to the ground of its own structure”. Subjectively, Tillich’s “immediate religious certainty” can be acknowledged as certain, and the question of God as necessary, only for those who accept the question (and therewith, the idea of something unconditional/God within reality) at least as possible. This may sound as a truism or a tautology. And it may be possible to deny or refute certain forms of the ontological attempt of catching “the way in which potential infinity is present in actual finitude”. Tillich sees no danger in the destruction of the ontological argument. But if one wants to destroy the entire approach, namely the attempt, in whatever form, of elaborating “the possibility of the question of God”, that would be “dangerous”. We would lose, then, all possible “acknowledgment of the unconditional element in the structure of reason and reality”.

I conclude that the lasting relevance and indispensable upshot of the ontological approach according to Tillich is what he called the mystical apriori - an immediate awareness, presupposing at least the recognition of the question of God, the possibility of something unconditional appearing within existence. In fact, this mystical apriori is the real precondition, even for the metaphysical apriori we discussed earlier (8.1.1.c). Accepting at least the question for something unconditional within conditioned existence implies accepting the possibility of God. It is the necessary precondition for any actual recognition, no matter whether this consists in a positive valuation, severe criticism, or even plain denial. Traditionally, proving (the existence of) God, or at least recognizing something of the unconditional/God within human existence was the endeavour of the cosmological (and physico-teleological) argument. Purely on themselves, these attempts had neither substance, nor persuasiveness. They can only be of help when based on the ontological approach. Thus, Tillich combined the two, adopting the ontological approach (mystical apriori) in what he called the cosmological principle which he described as follows: “The Unconditioned of which we have an immediate awareness, without inference, can be recognized in the cultural and natural universe”. What he implies here is that all kinds of serious cultural creations, secular as they may be (like art, science, legislation, politics, social work, ethics etc), represent an ultimate concern of which “it is possible to recognize the...
unconscious theological character”. The concern is undeniable, its content must be debated. This brings us to the question in what sense religion as ultimate concern is seen by Tillich as a general anthropological phenomenon.

8.1.2.a.ii Religion as ultimate concern: universally human

Saying that the state of being unconditionally concerned is “universally human” implies an ‘ontological’ take of religion which was favoured by Tillich already in his article “the Conquest ...”. Three decades later (in 1950s), he similarly asserts that religion in its essence is an integral dimension, a “necessary aspect of man’s spiritual life”, thus opposing all visions, both emic and etic, that see religion as accidental. On this point orthodox theologians and modern critics agree, though on different grounds. The former hold that faith is “not a creation of the human spirit … but a gift of the divine Spirit”, the latter that faith or religion is only a transitory “mythological stage” in human development. Both perspectives agree that faith or religion is “not an essential quality” of the human spirit. According to Tillich, their agreement is due to an underlying concept they implicitly share. Both see religion as directedness to “a highest being called God”. The difference, of course, is that this “highest being” is affirmed as existing by traditional believers and denied as such by the modern critics. Tillich, however, rejects the entire concept as inadequate.

If you start with the question whether God does or does not exist, you can never reach Him; and if you assert that He does exist, you can reach Him even less than if you assert that He does not exist. A God about whose existence or non-existence you can argue is a thing beside others within the universe of existing things. And the question is quite justified whether such a thing does exist, and the answer is equally justified that it does not exist. It is regrettable that scientists believe that they have refuted religion when they rightly have shown that there is no evidence whatsoever for the assumption that such a being exists. Actually, they have not only not refuted religion, but they have done it a considerable service. They have forced it to reconsider and to restate the meaning of the tremendous word God.

Clearly, Tillich’s own revision of the meaning of the word ‘God’ (8.1.1.e: God is the main symbol of ultimate reality) is closely connected with what he sees as the metaphysical soul of religion, namely that, under the impact of something unconditional, humans are ultimately or unconditionally concerned. Just as discussions concerning the existence of God are pointless, it is “meaningless to question the ultimacy of an ultimate concern”, since the element of ultimacy is “a matter of immediate ex-

166 O.c., 27.
167 See “The Conquest of the Concept of Religion” (1922), in What Is Religion, 134, where Tillich credits the romantic philosophy for providing the necessary theoretical means “by means of which the new spirit of an ontological consciousness of God can again flow”. It brought Tillich to a highly suggestive question: “How would it be, if above all the religious dimension had the qualities of unconditionality and certainty, and the world, culture and history were tentative and dubious secularizations of the holy which needed to be overcome?” Clearly, this would require a turn “away from the objective-technical apprehension of the world to an immediate-intuitive one”. Tillich mentions with appreciation “Otto’s apprehension of the numinous as a reality breaking through all objective forms”.
168 Theology of Culture, 3.
169 O.c., 4; Tillich refers to Comte as an example of this line of modern criticism.
170 O.c., 4f.
perience”. Such experience implies that “a finite being ... is grasped by and turned to the infinite”. It is “certain in so far as it is an experience of the holy”. Although this is primarily said by Tillich with regard to Christian faith, it is no less valid with respect to other forms of ultimate concern. Those who feel themselves grasped by an ultimate passion for truth, beauty, or moral goodness of some sort, are by no means in doubt of the reality, validity, or truth concerning the unconditional command they are following. This also counts for those who are taken by an infinite drive for achieving a highest possible performance, as reaching for gold at the Olympics.

The normative question of the various contents of ultimate concern is due for the next section. But it is indirectly relevant in the present one, because the question of content has often been mixed up with the question into what spiritual function religion - the religious awareness and the religious concern - must be categorized; or whether religion, whatever its content, represents a special human faculty. According to Tillich religion as ultimate concern is not a special function of the human spirit, but rather a dimension, namely “the dimension of depth” which can be present in all the spirit’s functions. And as depth dimension, religion can focus on various contents. In the ethical sphere, ultimate concern appears as the human response to the “unconditional seriousness of the moral demand”; in the sphere of knowledge and science as “passionate longing for ultimate reality”. In the aesthetic function of the human spirit, religion appears as the “infinite desire to express ultimate meaning”. In all cases it is the depth dimension of ultimate seriousness that characterizes the religious concern.

So far, I conclude that what Tillich sees as universally human about religion is not a specific content nor a universally common object-matter of religion but the human state (or at least potential) of being ultimately concerned. Universal is the ultimacy of a concern, and when such a concern is experienced in its depth and in one’s own depth, its ultimacy is direct, immediate and certain. All the words used, as concern, depth, ultimate seriousness, to describe the universal and potentially collective character of religion have, of course, an objective and a subjective side. Especially the latter side of ultimate concern, that is, the collective aspect of religion which corresponds to the personal-individual experience of something unconditional (fides qua creditur) is valued by Tillich as “religion in the largest and most basic sense of the word”. It must be distinguished from the various contents (fides quae creditur) that one’s religious or ultimate concern can adopt, either in personal piety or in an institutionalized form.

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171 Dynamics of Faith, 46.
172 Dynamics of Faith, 16; see also “The Conquest ...”, in What Is Religion, 153: where Tillich remarks with respect to those who withstand an exaggerated preoccupation with autonomy (technically, economically, politically etc.) and keep themselves open for theonomy: their reward is “the Unconditional breaking through all forms, not as law but as grace, as fate, as an immediately given overpowering reality ...”. According to Tillich, examples of such overwhelming revelation were “granted to antiquity in the dual form of Neoplatonic mysticism on the logical level and Christianity on the ethical”.
173 E.g., with respect to the man whose ultimate concern is a “sacred tree”, or “who adores Apollo”, see Dynamics of Faith, 46.
174 Theology of Culture, 5f.
175 O.c., 8.
176 Dynamics, 17; this view agrees with religion as a “breakthrough of the unconditionally real as the ground or reality of the whole of culture in all its functions” (What is Religion,148), see above 8.1.1.a
177 Theology of Culture, 7f; or as “religion in its innermost nature” in “The Lost dimension ...”, in The Saturday Evening Post, June 14, 1958, 76.
which he designated as religion in the “narrower and customary sense”\textsuperscript{178}. It is to this “narrower” aspect of the content or religion that I will now turn.

8.1.2.a.III Religion and religious concern: whatever the content

So far, it seems that Tillich is more interested in the immediate ultimacy of human concern than in its content; more in unconditional seriousness, passionate longing or infinite desire than in the object matter these religious cravings aim at. One can easily get the impression that anything goes. However, Tillich is more specifically Christian than it might look, though in his own dialectical way. Bold as the words “whatever the content” in the Introduction to \textit{Systematic Theology} II may sound, the two major issues in the very same volume are Tillich’s description of human existence as “estrangement” on the one hand, and the quest for “New Being”, on the other. Only in connection to these issues, the predication “whatever the content” receives its meaning. To take the concept of New Being as an example, its content is closely connected with the being and meaning of Jesus Christ in whom - as Tillich even observes – history has come to an end, not in time, but in meaning:

Nothing qualitatively new in the dimension of the ultimate can be produced by history which is not implicitly present in the New Being in Jesus as the Christ. The assertion that the Christ is the ‘end’ of history ... is not absurd if one understands the double sense of ‘end’, namely, ‘finish’ and ‘aim’. In the sense of finish, history has not yet come to an end. It goes on and shows all the characteristics of existential estrangement. ... In the sense of aim, history has come to an intrinsic end qualitatively, namely, in the appearance of the New Being as a historical reality.\textsuperscript{179}

Presenting the New Being as it appeared in the existence and through the healing power of Jesus Christ as “the ultimate criterion” of our religious, ultimate concern, Tillich does not mean that there is no valid content to religion apart from the event of Christ. Saving power can be found anywhere among humans but, according to Tillich, it “must be judged by the saving power in Jesus as the Christ”.\textsuperscript{180} Thus the content may vary infinitely, yet there is a specific norm embodied by Jesus as the Christ. Against this background, descriptions of religion that sound rather general actually have a rather specific content, e.g., when Tillich observes that the universally human state ‘of being ultimately concerned’ implies “asking passionately the question of the meaning of our existence and being willing to receive answers, even if the answers hurt”; and, similarly, that in its innermost nature, religion is “being concerned about one’s own being and being universally”.\textsuperscript{181} Such seemingly open and not explicitly Christian descriptions of what religion really is, nevertheless do suggest a very specific direction

\textsuperscript{178} \textit{Theology of Culture}, 8; also: “The Lost dimension in Religion”, in \textit{The Saturday evening Post}, June 14, 1958, 76. In the opening chapter of \textit{Dynamics of Faith}, when especially focused on the question ‘What (Christian) Faith is?’, the state of ultimate concern is designated by Tillich as “the formal definition of faith” (4) which he distinguished from ‘Faith as a centered act’. This is faith as “a total act of acceptance and surrender” (7). As such, faith is according to Tillich indeed “an act of the will” (7f.), though “not a creation of the will” (7), by which he means that ‘what concerns one ultimately’ must certainly be affirmed by the individual believer, but this concern is not created by him or her. Instead, as something unconditional, the ultimate concern of faith conditions us and not the other way around.

\textsuperscript{179} \textit{ST} II, 119f. (131).
\textsuperscript{180} \textit{ST} II, 167f. (181).
\textsuperscript{181} “The Lost dimension in Religion”, in \textit{The Saturday Evening Post}, June 14, 1958, 76.
in which religious content must be searched for: values of responsibility, temperance, conservation, taking care etc. On the other hand, there is no intention of absolutizing the Christian religion, not even the Christ.

This becomes especially clear in Tillich’s adoption of an intrinsically relativizing and also self-critical element at the heart of his theology and Christology which he designated as “final revelation”. The revelation in Jesus as the Christ is final and therefore “universally valid” because it “includes the criterion of every revelation …”. Moreover, a revelation is final “if it has the power of negating itself without losing itself”. This concerns in particular the medium of revelation and the question whether he/she/it has the power to “overcome[] its own finite conditions by sacrificing them, and itself with them”. According to Tillich, Jesus is the “Christ as the one who sacrifices what is merely ‘Jesus’ in him”. The decisive trait in the whole Gospel is that it reveals the “continuous self-surrender of Jesus who is Jesus to Jesus who is the Christ”. Final revelation is thus the precise opposite of idolatry, which implies “the elevation of the medium of revelation to the dignity of the revelation itself”. Not unlike many true prophets in ancient Israel Jesus had to counter this temptation, sometimes against the wish of his own disciples. Clearly, the character of final revelation gives special meaning not only to the idea of Jesus as the norm, but also to the words “whatever the content”. It means that also “non-symbolical” or finite contents can be part of ultimate concern, that is, to the extent that no finite content whatsoever may be raised to infinite standing. Even Jesus subdued his finite human self to the infinite Spirit of the divine.

I conclude that the words “whatever the content” do not imply that ‘anything goes’, since all content are measured by the criterion of the New Being in Jesus as the Christ. We will see that Tillich was well aware of the fact that the content of a concern can be distorted through estrangement (see 8.2 Hamartiology). But firstly, I turn to the more theological approach of the unconditional element by asking for the religious quality or nature of God’s unconditionality, as related to the conditioned reality of ordinary human beings.

8.1.2. B THE PROTESTANT PRINCIPLE

When approached theologically, the unconditional element is symbolically addressed as God. Theology asks for the quality and impact of divine unconditionality, primarily with respect to human existence. It largely does so in the symbolic setting of a personal relationship. The Christian term for the unconditionality of God is grace which according to Tillich is the essence of Protestantism in particular. Therefore, he called it the protestant principle. The initial impetus leading to this central ‘princi-

182 ST I, 137. See for a brief discussion of final revelation (vollkommene oder letztgültige Offenbarung): Schüßler & Sturm, Paul Tillich, Leben, Werk, Wirkung, 147-149. Reference is also made by the authors to the lectures Tillich held in Dresden (1925-27) on what he then called “vollkommene Offenbarung” (ENGW, 45). My own account is based on ST I, 132-137 (158-164).

183 ST I, 133 (159).

184 ST I, 134 (161).

185 ST I, 133 (160); see also ST III, 380f (432f), where Tillich enumerates examples of demonization in the history of Christianity and the Church.

186 It occurs to me that talking about a ‘principle’ is a turn away from seeing things in personal terms. See Protestant Era, xxx where Tillich observes that his interpretation of justification “had important theological consequences beyond the personal”. In 8.4.2.c I will return to this point.
ple’ in Tillichean theology, again, came from Martin Kähler whose work took the doctrine of ‘justification through faith’ as its central theme. ’Tillich’s basic perspective of the protestant principle is closely connected to the central protestant doctrine, drawing its implications and power - from the well-known idea of sola gratia. In the present section, I will firstly describe Tillich’s principle generally (i. The protestant principle as sola gratia). Then I will describe the two complementary characteristics of the principle, on the one hand its creative-justifying side (ii. Unconditional acceptance), on the other hand its critical side (iii. Unconditionally critical).

8.1.2.b.i. THE PROTESTANT PRINCIPLE AS SOLA GRATIA

The attempt by Kähler to combine the idea of justification with his own classical education and with the humanistic intellectual background of many of his students, led Tillich to the conviction that justification through faith not only has bearing on the sinner but also on the one who is in severe doubt about God. Even disbelief – described as the epitome of sin by great names in the history of Christianity - does not necessarily separate us from God, because “there is faith in every serious doubt, namely the faith in the truth as such”. Here, Tillich puts forward his own formal understanding of religion or faith as the state of being ultimately concerned, as the dimension of depth, or the element of ultimate seriousness in whatever cultural activity one is engaged in. This means that even in the conviction of complete absence of truth, if experienced in its depth and as an ultimate concern, the divine is present. It brought Tillich to the paradoxical and provocative idea “that he who seriously denies God, affirms him”, the theological foundation of which is the equally paradoxical (and positive) doctrine of justification. As Tillich observes:

There is … no place beside the divine, there is no possible atheism, there is no wall between the religious and the nonreligious. The holy embraces both itself and the secular. … You cannot reach God by the work of right thinking or by a sacrifice of the intellect or by a submission to strange authorities, such as the doctrines of the church and the Bible … and you are not even asked to try it. Neither works of piety nor works of morality nor works of the intellect establish unity with God. They follow from this unity, but they do not make it.

187 Kähler inspired both the intention of Tillichean theology as mediation theology (see above, § 8, Introduction) and also, materially, its central content or matter.
188 Cf. Die Wissenschaft der christlichen Lehre (1883); Kähler is also known for his standpoint vis-à-vis the so-called Leben Jesu Forschung, cf. his pamphlet “Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus” (1892; 1896).
189 Tillich, Protestant Era, xxix.
190 Dynamics of Faith, 1; 4.
191 “The Lost dimension in Religion”, in: The Saturday Evening Post, June 14, 1958, 29, 76.
192 Theology of Culture, 8.
193 Protestant Era, xxix.
194 Tillich’s rendering of the protestant principle of justification can be taken as the “ Positive Wurzel” or as the “Positives Paradox” that he was missing in the early dialectical theology of Barth, Gogarten c.s., see the article “Kritisches und Positives Paradox, eine Auseinandersetzung mit Karl Barth und Friedrich Gogarten” (1923) in: G.W. VII, 223, 225. See Introduction to this paragraph §8, nt. 14
195 Protestant Era, xxixf; with respect to the early polemic with Barth c.s. (previous note), Tillich commented as follows: „Es war der Durchbruch der Gewissheit, dass es auch eine Rechtfertigung des „Unreligiösen” und des „Atheisten” und des „Lästerers des Menschensohnes” geben kann, wenn nur der Geist der Wahrheit nicht gelästert wird“, see GW VII, 240.
The religious-ethical paradox of the doctrine of justification, according to which the sinner is justified, though unjust, is universalized and similarly appropriated by Tillich to the religious-intellectual situation of epistemic doubt, of questioning or even despair about meaninglessness. The very seriousness of doubt, the heartfelt understanding of the absence of God indicates the paradoxical, but positive, “presence of the divine in the experience of utter separation from it”.196

Now, this could be mistaken to mean that one is justified by one’s own seriousness, the latter, so to speak, being the cause. The same misunderstanding has been made regarding the idea of justification only by faith’ (sola fide), as if one is justified not by one’s own ‘works’ but only by the act of one’s faith. Against this confusion, Tillich stated that “not faith but grace is the cause of justification”, emphasizing that God alone is the cause while faith, being itself a gift of grace, is the “receiving act”197. Therefore, the central Protestant doctrine should be named by the formula “justification by grace through faith”. Clearly, Tillich derived his perspective directly from the reformers’ theme sola gratia when stating that

it should be regarded as the Protestant principle that, in relation to God, God alone can act and that no human claim, especially no religious claim, no intellectual or moral or devotional ‘work’, can reunite us with him.198

Although this definition of the protestant principle is put in a negative or at least restrictive form, it has as its primary substance the infinite opening of divine grace, the central Christian symbol of religious unconditionality. Thus, the protestant principle first of all points to a broad and creative energy of divine comprehensiveness (ii. Unconditional acceptance); yet, it contains a radically critical impetus as well (iii. Unconditionally critical).

8.1.2.b.ii Unconditional acceptance

The inclusive side of the protestant principle is given with the positive paradox of justification, sola gratia. As we have seen, Tillich enlarged and universalized its scope to encompass the whole world, that is, humanity in the entire spectrum of its deficiency, not only qua sin but also qua lacking knowledge, doubt or even intellectual denial regarding God. Without abandoning the term ‘justification’, as derived from the cultic sphere of Jewish law, Tillich suggested to replace it in Christian teaching and preaching by “acceptance”, meaning that “we are accepted by God although being unacceptable according to the criteria of the law”.199 Not only within the personal sphere, but also beyond it in culture and history, the protestant principle of justification in the sense of radicalized divine acceptance has important theological consequences. If the holy embraces both itself and the secular as Tillich put it, then

no realm of life can exist without relation to something unconditional, to an ultimate concern. Religion, like God, is omnipresent; its presence, like that of God, can be forgotten,

196 Protestant Era, xxx; confer ST I, 223: the “existential seriousness” with which a question is asked “is evidence of the impact of the Spiritual Presence upon an individual”.
197 ST III, 224 (258).
198 ST III, 224 (257).
199 ST I, 224f; also the famous sermon “You are accepted”, in: The Shaking of Foundations.
neglected, denied. But it is always effective, giving inexhaustible depth to life and inexhaustible meaning to every cultural creation.\footnote{200 The Protestant Era, xxx; also: xxix, with respect to: the holy embracing itself and the secular.}

Seemingly, the “creative-omnipresence”\footnote{201 O.c., xxxv.} of the unconditional God described in these lines is not far removed from Schleiermacher in his \textit{On Religion} (1799), who took every impression stemming from the universe as God acting on us.\footnote{202 Schleiermacher, \textit{On Religion}, 82 (57): „Alle Begebenheiten in der Welt als Handlungen eines Gottes vorstellen, das ist Religion“.} In the initial introduction to the present paragraph (§8), I described Tillich’s theological attitude as enthusiastically welcoming the unlimited richness of all possible sources for systematic theology. What he found insufficient in Schleiermacher was a strong normative and critical faculty in order to evaluate and find structure in the overwhelming supply from the sources. This brings us to the critical-transcendent side of his own perspective of the protestant principle.

\textbf{8.1.2.b.III. Unconditionally Critical}

Given the character of \textit{sola gratia} as unconditioned, the broadness of grace implies also that God’s acceptance is keenly opposed to every more or less pretentious claim of being in possession of the love or wisdom of God under one’s own terms. If it is \textit{only} grace that can help us, truly accept us, then grace is intrinsically linked with watchful criticism against those who take divine acceptance as a matter of course and consider themselves, so to speak, as being in charge of it. Due to its critical-transcendent side, the protestant principle can never comply with “any identification of grace with a visible reality”.\footnote{203 Protestant Era, xxxvi.} That which is given unconditionally, like \textit{mannah} in the desert, cannot be put in stock, so to speak. Instead of being identified with any given or becoming reality, the unconditional quality of God in his grace breaks through every human claim on ultimate truth, whether of conservative ecclesiasticism or of revolutionary utopianism.\footnote{204 O.c., 43; also xxxv: the “critical-transcendence of the divine” stands according to Tillich “over against conservatism and utopianism”.} At this point Tillich explicitly honours the “theology of crisis” represented by “Barth in his powerful commentary on … the Romans”. There is no finite reality whatsoever that can claim an absolute or infinite status.\footnote{205 O.c., 43 (GW VI, 14f); the reference concerns “Kairos I” which was originally written in German language (1922), appearing in English translation in: Protestant Era (1948), 37-58.} Clearly, the Protestant principle does not coincide with the Protestant reality. Therefore, its critical power must be applied where and when identification is likely to loom, not in the least in the realm of Protestant \textit{reality} itself, the visible churches, the perspective on the Holy Scripture and all other forms of religious and cultural Protestantism.\footnote{206 See o.c., xxxvii; the Protestant principle is not the same as the Protestant reality. Instead, the question must be asked, said Tillich, how principle and reality are related, in other words “how the life of the Protestant churches is possible under the criterion of the Protestant principle, and how a culture can be influenced and transformed by Protestantism”. All articles brought together in \textit{The Protestant Era} deal in some way with these questions.}
The most striking token of the Protestant principle as structural auto-criticism is Tillich’s understanding of final revelation, referred to above (8.1.2.a.iii). With this notion he tried to overcome the conflict between absolutism and relativism. The Holy Scriptures give us “examples which point to that which is absolute; but the examples are not absolute in themselves”. This holds true even, and in particular, concerning the central instance of Christian faith: the appearance of the New Being in Jesus as the Christ. The absolute revelatory aspect of the event of Jesus as the Christ “involves the complete transparency and the complete self-sacrifice of the medium in which it appears”.207

This major example makes clear that the quality of being ‘final’, that is, the auto-critical side of the Protestant principle, should be a quality of Christianity as a whole. Christian faith is ‘final’ to the extent that it contains “the power of criticizing and transforming each of its historical manifestations; and just this power is the Protestant Principle”. It therefore, transcends actual Protestantism. Even if the Protestant era and its visible forms would come to an end, this might lead (on the basis of creative-accepting side of the Protestant principle) to “a new form of Christianity” even though, according to Tillich, we cannot know the precise elements and particulars in advance.208

So far, the focal point of attention was on the other side so to speak, on the essential character of the absolute, the essence of ultimate reality, designated theologically and symbolically as the personal God and philosophically as “something unconditioned”, and also referred to with many other equivalent terms (being itself, the ground of being, the origin of ultimate concern, the infinite, absolute reality etc.). It is now time to turn more in particular to this side of reality, which is the human side, the side of conditioned, human existence.

8.2 Hamartiology

Thus far it has appeared that the transcendence and unconditionality of ultimate reality do not only stand for the highest critical instance, but also include intimate nearness and closeness towards empirical actual reality. With respect to the divine-human relationship, this was theologically expressed by Tillich in the Protestant principle (8.1.2.b) implying that in any human situation the divine element is unconditionally present, both accepting (grace) and critical (grace only). The unconditional or divine element is in particular present in every genuinely serious or ultimate concern by which someone is captured, and that then is adopted independent of whether this presence is subjectively affirmed as divine or not. And although they need not be distant ontological strangers to each other, this also implies that humankind is obviously separated or estranged from God,209 which involves divine-human distance and possible opposition. Theologically this aspect of the divine-human relationship is analysed in the doctrines of creation and sin; philosophically it is expressed in the ontological distinc-

207 ST I, 151 (179, 180).

208 Protestant Era, xxxvii; one is inadvertently reminded of Bonhoeffer’s speculation about the end of religion as articulated in the traditional concepts of faith and, in that sense, the coming of a religion-less era with a new, possibly unreligious language, see Bonhoeffer, Widerstand und Ergebung, 207 (letter to his godchild); also 219 (letter to Bethge on June, 6th, 1944) dwelling on the subject of a “non-religious interpretation of theological concepts”. Tillich, according to Bonhoeffer, tried a religious interpretation of the autonomous world.

209 See the quote from “The two types of Philosophy of Religion” in the introduction to this paragraph.
tion of “essential and existential being”. This distinction has a vital and omnipresent role in the whole of Tillich’s philosophic-theological work, which shows his strong preference for Existentialism as tool for the analysis of the human predicament. As such this analysis is not yet a theological or religious matter. But the questions that are raised by the Existential analysis do form the object matter for theology to address.

Therefore, in the first part of the present paragraph, I will describe from where Tillich has taken his central philosophical distinction and the way it was used by existentialists in particular to interpret the philosophical, cultural, and religious situation of their time (8.2.1 The distinction of the essential and existential realm). The distinction is not a static one, since there is a continuous dynamic going on between essence and existence, which Tillich described as ‘transition from essence to existence’ and its inevitable spin-off which is ‘estrangement’. The two philosophical notions are close to one another, with partial overlap; and they are used by Tillich in correlation with the theological notions of creation, F/fall, sin, and evil. The symbol ‘transition’ he used primarily to illuminate the doctrines of creation and Fall. This will be addressed in the second sub-paragraph (8.2.2 The transition from essence to existence: creation and the Fall). The combination with ‘creation’ and ‘fall’ might give the false impression that the transition from essence to existence belongs to the past, or only to the first origin of all things. Instead the form ‘transition from essence to existence’ can be illuminating with respect to all phenomena within existence, phenomena of becoming in which some idea is realized. But whenever such transition happens, some measure of estrangement is implied.

With respect to phenomena of becoming and actualization within human existence Tillich primarily used the notion estrangement. ‘Estrangement’ is used as a tool for the interpretation of human behaviour and development, human dynamics and reality, and in particular to interpret the phenomena that are traditionally described in terms of sin (8.2.3 Estrangement and Sin), and evil (8.2.4 Estrangement and evil).

8.2.1 THE DISTINCTION OF THE ESSENTIAL AND EXISTENTIAL REALM

The distinction between essence and existence, between the essential and the existential realm is an ontological one. But the interpretation and valuation of the elements within the distinction can differ. In different forms of Idealism or Essentialism priority is attributed to the essential realm over existence. In Existentialism the valuation is opposite. Within his take of Existentialism Tillich has distinguished three aspects or meanings which mirror the Existentialist interpretation of the relationship between the essential and the existential. These three aspects of Existentialism form the object-matter of the three sections: 8.2.1. a The Existentialist point of view; 8.2.1. b The Existentialist protest; 8.2.1. c The Existentialist expression. In all three subsections, the background question is how the existentialist worldview which Tillich has described in close connection with the Christian perspective, relates to the worldview

210 ST I, 165 (195): “Both in experience and in analysis, being manifests the duality of essential and existential being. There is no ontology which can disregard these two aspects . . .”.
211 ST I, 204 (238): “The distinction between essence and existence . . . is the backbone of the whole body of theological thought. It must be elaborated in every part of the theological system”.
212 ST II, 26 (32). “Existentialism is an analysis of the human predicament”.
213 Tillich, Courage to Be (CtB) 126-141, 126; some words about the context and meaning of the book will be spilled below, see 8.2.1. c. the Existentialist expression.
of the post-war New Age movement in general; and in particular, whether there are similarities with respect to ideas we have encountered in the primary sources of New Age religion in Part Two.

8.2.1. a. THE EXISTENTIALIST POINT OF VIEW

To the extent that God is the answer to the question implied in being, systematic theology must consider the basic ontological question of the so called “first philosophy”, which is about the conditions that make being to be-ing.214 One of the main ontological concepts with great theological significance expresses the power of being to exist and the difference between essential and existential being. Both in experience and in analysis being manifests the duality of essential and existential being. There is no ontology which can disregard these two aspects, whether they are hypostasized into two realms (Plato), or combined in the polar relation of potentiality and actuality (Heidegger), or contrasted with each other (…) or derived from each other (…).215

According to Tillich there is no serious philosophical or theological thought that does not contain some sentence of this duality within its concept of being, be it as awareness of the discrepancy between the ideal versus the real, or of truth against error, good against evil.216 Most decisive in this respect was Plato, teaching the separation of the human soul from its home in the realm of pure essences. Man is estranged from what he essentially is. His existence in a transitory world contradicts his essential participation in the eternal world of ideas. … The Platonic distinction between the essential and the existential realms is fundamental for all later developments.217

For Tillich, the ‘existential point of view’ is implied whenever “the problem of the human situation [is] experienced by the individual”.218 Platonism and classical Christian theology share such a view, namely that human existence is not what is should be and could be. The existentialist view with its critical analysis of the human predicament has led in history to a great deal of sensible insight into the negativities of human existence. Tillich points to examples ranging from Augustine’s examination of human sin, Dante’s Divina Comedia to Breughel’s Tower of Babel. But both the Platonic and the Christian view remain “within the frame of their Essentialist ontology”.219 This means that while existence is seen as separated or estranged from its essential origin, both the Platonist and the Christian stick to an underlying conviction of a final return or reconciliation.220

214 ST I, 163: “What is that … which is always thought implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, if something is said to be”.
215 ST I, 165; Tillich actually distinguished four levels of ontological concepts (164f), firstly the subject-object structure implying the self-world distinction; secondly the ontological elements or polarities that constitute the basic structure of (human) being such as individuality-universality, dynamics-form, freedom-destiny; thirdly the essence-existence polarity described in the quotation as the conditions of existence, in which the power of being works; and fourthly, the traditional categories that form the structures of finite being and thinking such as time, space, causality, substance.
216 ST I, 202 (236).
217 CtB, 126f.
218 CtB, 130.
219 CtB, 128.
220 CtB, 127.
Thus, the existential point of view can be seen as a philosophical-ontological equivalent of the theological perception and analysis that form the basis of the doctrine of sin. Moreover, its inherent distinction between essence and existence, its criticism regarding human existence and outer being also shows some likeness to central ideas within New Age religion, such as the polarity between outer ego and inner self; or between the limited character of one’s outer personality and actual life that are supposed to be “not working well”, in contrast to the boundless possibilities of one’s truly inner identity and its many spiritual opportunities.221

8.2.1. b. The Existentialist protest against Essentialism

The Existentialist point of view, its otherworldly drift, does largely match with the main perspectives in the Middle Ages. But it became obscured, according to Tillich, in later Renaissance and was fully abandoned by Descartes. The latter is discredited by him for having a strong anti-Existential bias. The existential predicament is removed from the worldview to the extent that, as Tillich puts it, the human person “becomes pure consciousness, a naked epistemological subject”; moreover, the human being becomes “an object of scientific inquiry and technical management”.222

Tillich’s rejection of this Cartesian attitude toward world and one’s own psycho-somatic being, again, bears resemblance to similar New Age disqualifications,223 but for different if not opposite reasons. Tillich declines the Cartesian attitude because it ignores outer human existence in time and space. Its flaw is that human life under the conditions of finitude and estrangement is left out.224 New Age critics predominantly argue from their holistic point of view against what they call the ‘parts-meatlality’ in the Cartesian and Newtonian attitude towards outer existence. New Agers tend to approach outer existence as only a limited part of an unlimited whole. Actually, compared to this larger whole consisting in all the inner realities of unlimited consciousness, outer existence is seen as only a temporary projection, or even but an illusion. So where Tillich intends to focus more on existence in order to regain authentic humanity, two of the New Ager sources (Roberts, ACiM) tend to relativize outer existence, intuitively seeking one’s true being in the inner spiritual realms of consciousness.

According to Tillich, the anti-existentialist trend peaked in Hegel. As major advocate of idealism, also designated as Essentialism, Hegel gave full priority to essence over existence, to ‘ideas’ or ‘mind’ over ‘matter’, resolving so to speak the latter into

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221 See e.g., Heelas, New Age Movement, 137; Heelas (138) exemplifies the critical dissatisfaction concerning actual reality, which was omnipresent in the New Age Movement in the 1980’s, with Shirley Maclaine, stating that New Agers “are profoundly concerned with what is happening to our planet and all the life residing on it … [therefore they want] to save our planet from destruction by beginning with themselves” (cited from Shirley Maclaine, Going within: a guide for inner transformation.

222 C1b, 131.

223 For a description of New Age criticism on Cartesian and Newtonian thinking, see Hanegraaff, New Age Religion, 322f.; for the adoption by many New Agers of the theory of two hemispheres, namely a mechanistic, deconstructing-analytic, technocratic left-brained rationalism (associated with Descartes and Newton) versus a more holistic, intuitive right-brained inner vision and wisdom, see Hanegraaff, o.c., 224.

224 See CtB, 131f.; Philosophical existentialism “showed that behind the sum (I am) in Descartes’ Cogito ergo sum lies the problem of the nature of this sum which is more than mere cogitation (consciousness) – namely existence in time and space and under the conditions of finitude and estrangement”.
the former. Reality is seen by Hegel in terms of reason, as “a system of essences” of which the existing world is “the more or less adequate expression”.225

Hegel’s priority of mind over matter does inadvertently remind one of the radical anti-existentialist and a-cosmic impetus of ACIM described in Part Two (§4). Again, there seems to be both similarity and dissimilarity. In ACIM-parlance it is stated that the physically perceived world is indeed an expression - or rather: a projection - of the mind. But according to ACIM, one should say further that this physical world of imaginary projection is not a world of real existence. It is a totally unreal, illusory world, which only needs to be reversed or undone in the mind. Hegel also gave total priority to the mind (Absolute Geist) but took Its subsequent manifestation in physical and historical reality as Its rational unfolding: as the ‘real’ actualization of mind (Geist). For Hegel the world can be identified with the process of the divine self-realization; or, as Tillich puts it: “The world is the self-realization of the divine mind; existence is the expression of essence and not the fall away from it”.226

Even though he was a pure Essentialist, Hegel was not unaware of the fact that in the course of the Absolute Mind’s dialectical development estrangement does occur. But he was also convinced “that it has been overcome and that man has been reconciled with his true being”.227 It was precisely at this point that Hegel’s idealistic ontology was criticised by followers. Hegel’s higher synthesis may be a sophisticated performance on the conceptual stage of philosophical imagination. It may even help the Essentialist-philosopher to reconcile his ideas perfectly with ‘reality-as-he-understands-it’. But it leaves actual human reality completely untouched. The Existentialist protest was directed against Hegel’s philosophic “reconciliation with reality” for one reason, says Tillich, for the reason that it “left existence itself unreconciled”.228

Schelling was the first to use the term ‘existence’ in contradicting philosophical Essentialism.229 He and many of Hegel’s followers saw the latter’s synthesis of essence and existence as an “attempt to hide the truth about man’s actual state”. Each felt in his own way that the world in its various aspects of human life is far from reconciled. This was elaborated, as Tillich points out, with respect to the individual person (Kierkegaard), with respect to the working class within capitalist society (Marx), and with respect to ordinary life and ordinary people (Schopenhauer, Nietzsche).230 In opposition to Hegelian harmony they all emphasized

that man’s existential situation is a state of estrangement from his essential nature. … Existence is estrangement and not reconciliation. It is dehumanization and not the expression of essential humanity. It is the process in which man becomes a thing and ceases to be a

225 CtB, 133.
226 ST II, 24 (30); describing Hegel’s Essentialist view in philosophical terms, Tillich observed (CtB, 133f.) that according to Hegel, the world “is reasonable as it is. Existence is a necessary expression of essence. History is the manifestation of essential being under the conditions of existence. Its course can be understood and justified”.
227 ST II, 25 (31); this is Hegel’s category of “Aufheben”, which means bringing to a higher synthesis through initial negation (Theology of Culture, 84).
228 Theology of Culture, 83.
229 CtB, 135; According to Tillich, Schelling called Essentialism “negative philosophy” because it abstracts from real existence
230 ST II, 25.
person. History is not the divine self-manifestation but a series of un-reconciled conflicts, threatening man with self-destruction.\textsuperscript{231}

The contrast between essential description and existential analysis became a main issue not only for philosophers. Since the second and last third of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century the Existentialist revolt against any rose-coloured theory of idealist-evolutionary human progression was also taken up by writers, poets and expressionist painters.\textsuperscript{232} But it was only through the disaster of the Great War that the optimistic self-confidence of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century was finally swept away. Serving as an Army Chaplain Tillich witnessed the massacre near Verdun as the horrific symbol for the entire war. In his eyes and in the eyes of many others, the Existentialist criticism ceased to be revolt. Instead, says Tillich, it became the revealing mirror of an “experienced reality”.\textsuperscript{233}

8.2.1.c The Existentialist expression (both countercultural and constructive)

With the third aspect or meaning of Existentialism Tillich had in mind the philosophic, artistic and literary expression of his time: the period dominated by the two World Wars. The protest that, according to Tillich, had developed into a more or less conscious movement in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century has “largely determined the destiny of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century”.\textsuperscript{234} The Existentialist expression that Tillich referred to had a strong culture-critical or countercultural character, on the one hand exerting rigorous criticism on human life as it was lived. On the other hand, it was constructive as far as the attempt was made to find and uphold the authentic self. Tillich has described and used the Existentialist analysis and expression especially in two famous publications. In \textit{Religiöse Lage der Gegenwart} (1926)\textsuperscript{235} the existential revolt is interpreted and used as protest against the spirit of bourgeois-capitalist society that survived the Great War.\textsuperscript{236} A quarter of a century later, he analysed the situation of religion after the second World War in the Terry Lectures (1950/51) at Yale University, published as \textit{The Courage to Be} (1952).

This book evoked a broad discussion of religion in the light of existentialist philosophy, art and literature. It offers an elaborate picture of mid-20\textsuperscript{th}-century culture and its problems and anxieties, especially the search for human authenticity amidst the despairing experience of meaninglessness. In the man-created world of post-war industrial redevelopment, technical progress and rapid increase of goods and products, the human person is analysed as being in danger of losing his subjectivity, her human

\textsuperscript{231} ST II, 25 (31); cf. also \textit{CtB.}, 137: “It was the threat of an infinite loss, namely the loss of their individual persons, which drove the revolutionary Existentialists of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century to their attack”.

\textsuperscript{232} Cf. \textit{The religious situation}, 88ff.; \textit{CtB}, 137: Tillich points at expressionist painters as Cézanne, Van Gogh and Munch, and literary artists that are designated by him as “Existentialist revolutionaries” like Baudelaire and Rimbaud in poetry, Flaubert and Dostoevsky in novel, Ibsen and Strindberg in the theatre. Their “discoveries in the deserts and jungles of the human soul … were confirmed and methodologically organized by depth psychology”.

\textsuperscript{233} For the impact of the Great War on Tillichean thinking, see Schüssler, W., \textit{Paul Tillich} (1997), 13; \textit{CtB}, 137. Tillich himself in: \textit{The Interpretation of History}, 35: “The World War in my own experience was the catastroph e of idealistic thinking in general” (= \textit{GW} XII,34).

\textsuperscript{234} \textit{CtB}, 126.

\textsuperscript{235} In translation: \textit{The Religious Situation} (1956); the German original is included in: \textit{GW} X, 9-93.

\textsuperscript{236} \textit{Religious Situation}, 47 (\textit{GW} X, 17). Capitalist Society is depicted by Tillich as the epitome of a “self-assertive, self-sufficient type of existence”. He exemplifies the protest with the philosopher (Nietzsche), the poet (Strindberg) and the painter (Van Gogh): “all three, were broken mentally and spiritually in their desperate struggle with the spirit of capitalist society” (46f.)
‘self’. Modern industrious man “has sacrificed himself to his own productions”. Existentialists experience this dehumanization as a desperate situation. Authors like Kafka, Camus, Arthur Miller save their authenticity and humanity by refusing to look away. They describe the human situation ruthlessly as without an exit. Accordingly, Existentialism in philosophy, art and literature is

the expression of the anxiety of meaninglessness and of the attempt to take this anxiety into the courage to be as oneself. Recent Existentialism … has experienced the universal breakdown of meaning. Twentieth-century man has lost a meaningful world and a self which lives in meanings out of a spiritual centre.

The Existentialist observations and expressions of meaninglessness are very disturbing to those who still feel comfortable in adapting themselves to the majority of society. To them, a play like Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* (1949) is a morbid piece full of negativities. They call it decay, says Tillich, but it actually is “the creative expression of decay”. Moreover, apart from heated indignation, the play also received a multiple audience with large crowds that went watching it. This observation brought Tillich to suggest that the Existentialists, their readers and followers

are a vanguard which precedes a great change in the spiritual and social-psychological situation. It may be that the limits of the courage to be as a part have become visible to more people than the increasing conformity shows. If this is the meaning of the appeal that Existentialism has on the stage, one should observe it carefully and prevent it from becoming the forerunner of collectivist forms of the courage to be as a part.

Against the increasing conformity in the early 1950s, Tillich was anticipating a great spiritual “change”, which would also transform the social-psychological situation. He saw the existentialist expressions as a turn away from the conformist attitude of deriving your courage from “being as a part”, mostly leading to adapting yourself to a collective whole. On the other hand Tillich also warns against possible new forms of collectivism or neo-collectivisms of which Fascism, Nazism and Communism were earlier forms. In positive terms, Tillich seems to opt for a more personal-driven development, a shift away from the adaptive or collectivist type of human being, which

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237 *CitB*, 139.
238 *CitB.*, 140; also 147f., about modern artists having the courage to face the meaninglessness of our existence and to express it in their art. In this way, says Tillich, they prove to have “the courage to be as themselves”.
239 *CitB*, 139.
240 *Death of a Salesman* (1949) is the distressing story of an insignificant and unsuccessful salesman, hopelessly obsessed with the American dream which, unsuccessfully, he tries to pass on to his sons.
241 Tillich admits that those crowds of theatergoers are still an infinitely small percentage of the American population, adding between brackets: “even if one adds to them all the cynics and despairing ones in our institutions of higher learning”, *CitB*, 145f.
242 *CitB*, 146
243 See also: *CitB*, 96f. As a possible new development with a neo-collectivist character Tillich could think of McCarthyism (1950-54), the so-called McCarthy hearings against persons suspected of communist sympathies. The term McCarthyism also applies to the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), established in 1937 under the chairmanship of senator Martin Dies and soon receiving moral support from the Ku Klux Klan. Originally established as an investigative committee of the House of Representatives it was abolished in 1975.
is simultaneously a shift toward a more personal-individual or authentic courage: to be as one self. According to Tillich, those who profess the cause of the Existentialist expression are at the front of this spiritual and societal transformation.

It is tempting to draw parallels between what Tillich presented as the Existentialist expression with the “cultic milieu” in which the early New Age (sensu stricto) gradually transformed in the 1970s into the broadening movement (sensu lato) in the 1980s (2.1.1.a). What the Existentialists share with the early New Age is, firstly, a culture-critical or counter-cultural attitude. In both perspectives actual human life as it is, or as it is experienced, is interpreted as far removed from what it is supposed to be. Secondly, this experience brought many Existentialists to the expression of despair, an irrepressible and profound anxiety of having no exit. Similar feeling of desperate concern about actual existence can be noticed in parts of the in some cases even pre-millenarian or catastrophic-apocalyptic spirituality of the New Age sensu stricto (see 2.2.1.a). With respect to the emerging New Age sensu lato: the existentialist experience of post-war life, the expression of meaninglessness as described by Tillich borders on the New Age denunciation of outdated paradigms structuring human life, as described in the New Age manifesto The Aquarian Conspiracy (1981). Old ways, programs and rigid protocols of doing things in personal and societal life no longer made sense and were considered to be badly in need of transformation to fit in with the New Age.244 Both existentialists and the early New Agers until about 1980 are culture-critical and aspire for alteration in the spiritual, social-psychological, and environmental situation. There is also some overlap between the Existentialist quest for the authentic self, the self that has the courage to really be and become as oneself, and the spiritual quest of many New Agers for their real, higher, inner self, as distinguished from the outer ego. But clearly, there is great difference when the authentic or higher self is pursued in order to take one’s stand in the midst of outer existence, or to escape from it to a predominantly imaginary world.

8.2.2 The transition from essence to existence: creation and fall.

The ontological image ‘transition’ resembles to some extent the Neo-Platonic symbol ‘emanation’. Existence is the outward realization, the realization in time and space, of what are potentialities in the realm of essences. When in this imaginary context the form “transition from essence to existence” is connected with the theological notion ‘creation’, one’s imagination almost irresistibly wanders toward the original genesis of the world. But really Tillich used the form ‘transition’ predominantly with respect to the third (instead of the first) chapter of Genesis. He identified the ‘transition from essence to existence’ as the “half-way demythologization” of the myth of the Fall. With this partial demythologization he intended as far as possible to remove the element of “once upon a time”245 that seems ineradicably connected not only with

244 See the subtitle of Marilyn Ferguson’s The Aquarian Conspiracy: personal and societal change in the 1980s; Ferguson describes “change” and “paradigm shift” at all levels of life. In her perspective on New Age, the origin of all significant change in the world, in institutions as well as primarily in the individual person should come from within: “A new world, as the mystics have always said, is a new mind” (A.C., 38).

245 ST II, 29 (36); Tillich admitted that the notion ‘transition’ still contains a temporal and therewith a mythological (symbolic) element, whereas the abstractions ‘essence’ and ‘existence’ replace mythological states and figures. This is because, according to Tillich, “complete demythologization is not
the story of the fall, but no less with the story or poem of creation. According to Tillich, however, the transition from essence to existence “happens in all three modes of time”, it is a “universal quality of finite being”. It happens whenever something is created, or an idea is actualized. Transition happens whenever something potential becomes existentially real.

At first thought one might think this to imply eo ipso a step forward, a ‘gain’ that is obtained through creative realization, whenever some essence is transformed from something merely potential into the actuality of existence. But in the first volume of Systematic Theology (1951), elaborating his perspective on creation, and the transition from essence to existence, Tillich was quick in speaking about the “coincidence” of creation and the fall, seemingly emphasizing not only the aspect of ‘loss’ but also of the inevitably tragic character of both act and result of creation. This point provoked serious criticism, in particular from his friend Reinhold Niebuhr.

In the course of this paragraph (8.2) I will account for this discussion by stages (see small print sections: in 8.2.2.a; 8.2.2.b; 8.2.4.d.iii). Tillich took the criticism seriously and reacted to it in Systematic Theology II (1957). Responding to the criticism, however, did not mean weakening but rather emphasizing his controversial point of view. He now focused on the notion of the Fall, remarkably presented with a capital letter, which will be the subject of the second section (8.2.2.b. the Fall). But first, I turn to the perspective on creation and its most significant result which, according to Tillich, is the dynamic polarity of finite freedom and destiny, especially appearing in humanity (8.2.2.a Creation: finite freedom and destiny).

8.2.2.a. CREATION: FINITE FREEDOM AND DESTINY

In a subsection “Creation, Essence and Existence” under the larger heading of God as Creating, Tillich explains that the differentiation between essences and existence is preceded by “the creative process of the divine”. At this stage, God has a comprehensive vision of the creature in its “essential being” and in all the moments of its subsequent life-process, in a way that is somewhat similar to the creative “primary consciousness gestalt” (All That Is) in the Sethian cosmo-theology (3.1.d). But humankind and the rest of reality do not remain in the “creative ground of the divine life”, they are transferred from the realm of essences towards existence. Creation, in particular of human being, implies that

man has left the ground in order to ‘stand upon’ himself, to actualize what he essentially is, in order to be finite freedom. This is the point at which the doctrine of creation and the doctrine of the fall join. … Fully developed creatureliness is fallen creatureliness. … To be outside the divine life means to stand in actualized freedom, in an existence which is no longer united with essence. Seen from the one side, this is the end of creation. Seen from the other side, it is the beginning of the fall. Freedom and destiny are correlates. The point at which creation and fall coincide is as much a matter of destiny as it is a matter of freedom.

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246 ST II, 37, 36.
248 ST I, 254, 252 (293, 290).
249 ST I, 255 (294).
250 ST I, 255f (294f).
The creation or actualization of the human person has some closely connected features that are indicated here. The first is that, when created, the human being comes to stand upon him/herself. What beforehand was still united in the divine life is now subject to separation and estrangement. The second feature is “finite freedom”. The creative transition from what a human being is in essence, in the godly womb (symbolized by Adam before the fall), toward standing upon her/himself in existence (when expelled from paradise) is – according to Tillich – tantamount to the appearance of “finite freedom”. Freedom implies the possibility and duty (opdracht) of actualizing yourself, but this freedom is counterbalanced by destiny. Finite freedom, therefore, is the enterprise of becoming an independent person in spite of the estrangement “unavoidably” connected with it. From this follows the third feature, which is that finite freedom as the end of creation arises appears together with the fall. The fall belongs inherently to creation, it is part of the element of destiny which is the polar element of (finite) freedom.

Finite freedom and destiny, according to Tillich, belong inseparably together. As he had outlined earlier, the polar unity of freedom and destiny is always present in human existence as one of the ontological polarities or elements. He then criticized the more usual polarity of freedom versus necessity as inadequate by pointing out that “necessity is a category and not an element. Its contrast is possibility, not freedom”. When freedom is discussed as the opposite of necessity, the latter is taken as “mechanistic determinacy” while freedom then is seen as some kind of “indeterministic contingency”. But this is not how freedom is experienced by humans. Tillich made clear that as a human you can experience yourself as an individual and bearer of freedom only within and in close connection to the “larger structures” to which you belong. Your destiny is not a blind necessity impending from outside; instead, destiny points to the situation of which you are a part. Far from working mechanistically

destiny is not a strange power which determines what shall happen to me. It is myself as given, formed by nature, history, and myself. My destiny is the basis of my freedom; my freedom participates in shaping my destiny. Only he who has freedom has a destiny. … It points not to the opposite of freedom but rather to its condition and limits.

The polar unity of freedom and destiny is presented by Tillich as one of the most defining characteristics, not only of human being but, as he seems to imply, also of divine being. When the biblical creation story and the story of the fall are seen as describing one event, the conclusion must be, says Tillich, that the “unity of freedom and destiny” is already to be located “in the ground of being”. It is a mystery in God. Anyone, who accepts the twofold truth that nothing can happen to God accidentally, and that the state of existence is a fallen state, cannot evade to confess to “the point of coincidence between the end of creation and the beginning of the fall”. Criticism

251 ST I, 259 (299).
252 ST I, 182-186 (214-218).
253 ST I, 182.
254 ST I, 182f: “Destiny points to this situation in which man finds himself, facing the world to which, at the same time he belongs”.
255 ST I, 185. Destiny is carefully distinguished by Tillich from fate (Schicksal), which designates a contradiction to freedom rather than a polar correlation.
256 ST I, 256 (295); Tillich further observed that supralapsarian Calvinists, asserting that Adam fell by divine decree, at least had the courage to locate the central mystery where it belongs: “in the unity of
was aroused against the near equation of creation and fall, and against Tillich’s ontological reading of both sin and subsequently of evil.

According to Niebuhr, the shift from historical to ontological hermeneutics and the interpretation of the fall as an aspect of creation (255) is a falsification not only of the biblical picture of human being but also of the way it is experienced by humans. Tillich’s fusion of creation and the fall is only possible by denying the story of the fall its historical character, and further, by closely associating it with the Platonic myth of “the transcendent fall”, which is not in the Bible. Taking the fall as transcendent implies transforming original sin into an inevitable fate which excuses the sinner. But according to Niebuhr, in the Bible there is “only the myth of a historical fall” (256). The story does contain some elements of fate but the “emphasis lies upon freedom and responsibility” (255), which Niebuhr considered as confirmed by the experience of human conscience. Although we are created in such a way that no one can complete his life within himself, we nevertheless try to do so in various ways; but we do so, says Niebuhr, “never with an easy conscience”. In every act of self-aggrandizement or egoistic self-seeking, we know that we are “without excuse” (254). The historic urgency of every decision is that it can be either for the self or for God and the other. But this urgency is lost if my “fate of self-seeking is identified with (…) [my] fate of being a self” (261).

Niebuhr further elaborated his point with respect to both sin and evil. When the fall is interpreted as unavoidable aspect of creation, then sin is transformed from a historical and responsible choice into an “ontological fate” (256). But humans experience themselves “as creatures with indeterminate possibilities of good and evil … and these possibilities … confront us as persons and wills within a particular historical context, quite above the level of ontological fate”. Thus, Niebuhr holds on to “the historic evil of sin” (261, italics fo).

Finally, with respect to the perspective on evil, Niebuhr argued that viewing the fall as an implicit part of creation is opposed to “Christianity’s attitude toward time and history”. This attitude has always been one of “affirmation that creation is good”. But when the fall, and subsequently, existential human evil is explained ontologically, we cannot evade “the difficult conclusion that temporal existence is really evil” (261).

While Tillich was intent on maintaining both freedom and destiny within the analysis of the human situation, the result was in the eyes of Niebuhr and others that he had made both the individual sinner and existence fall victim to the overarching shadow of “ontological fate”. Certainly, Niebuhr with his criticism touched a sensitive spot. Tillich did not fail to answer in the second volume of his main work. The three points of criticism with respect to fall, sin, and evil are clearly mirrored in three subsequent sections Systematic Theology II. Below, these issues are discussed in the

257 Numbers in this small print section are taken from: Niebuhr, “Biblical thought and ontological speculation”; in: Kegley, Theology of Paul Tillich, 252-263.

258 Tillich had made a subtle distinction between destiny and fate, the former being part of the human self, including and even presupposing the self’s finite freedom, while the latter is its contradiction, see ST I,185 and note 255. Remarkably, this distinction fails in the German translation of ST I, 217. Niebuhr ignores Tillich’s distinction and speaks consistently of (ontological) fate instead of destiny, see Kegley, 254, 255, 256, 258, 261.

259 Niebuhr’s threefold criticism is answered in three subsequent sections of Part III. EXISTENCE AND THE CHRIST, in ST II. Niebuhr’s objection against the unbiblical equation of creation and fall is answered in Part III.I.B. The Transition from Essence to Existence and the Symbol of “the Fall”, ST II, 29-44 (35-52), N’s point against the ontological explanation of sin corresponds with III.I.C. The Marks of Man’s Estrangement and the Concept of Sin, ST II, 44-59 (52-68); the third objection against evil as ontological fate is taken up in III.I.D Existential Self-destruction and the Doctrine of Evil, ST II, 59-78.
sections 8.2.2.b; 8.2.3; and 8.2.4.

8.2.2.b Fall

In the section *The Transition from Essence to Existence and the Symbol of “the Fall”*260 Tillich responds to biblical objections against the coincidence of creation and fall and against the presumed consequences concerning human freedom and responsibility. In general, Tillich responds that he has no intention to “ontologize away the reality of the Fall and estrangement”.261 But he does not abandon his point of the concurrence of creation and fall. Creation is only removed from the centre of attention, while the “Fall” is strongly emphasized as a universal symbol and written with a capital letter.262 The “Fall” represents “the universal transition from essential goodness to existential estrangement”. And although conceived as a “cosmic event”, with subhuman and superhuman figures playing a role in the biblical myth, together with the dynamics of nature represented by the serpent, Tillich makes clear that in non-biblical myths as well as in the bible we are held responsible. “Only through man can transition from essence to existence occur”.263

Actually, these remarks taken together contain some rather stunning implications. Firstly, the Fall appears as the decisive transition in the genesis of human existence. Secondly, this decisive moment in the creation of humankind could only be advanced by a human being him/herself. It may be that through accentuating the decisive human role this way, Tillich wanted to stress human responsibility and thus take away the impression of the fall as the inevitable fate of creation. But this solution could hardly satisfy critics like Niebuhr, since Tillich did not give in to his biblical-hermeneutical objections. According to Tillich, the story of the original couple in its sinless originality must be taken purely mythical-symbolical and not in the least historical.264 Adam and Eve before the Fall give us a picture of our “essential nature” as humans. They show us the human being in his or her “essential” or “created goodness”.265 But even this latter designation does not, according to Tillich, refer to a state of being that has ever existed in time and space.266 The state of our “essential being is not an actual stage of human development”.267 Created goodness, original integrity or primal righteousness, as suggested in the biblical myth, point to the ideal or potentiality of what human kind could be or is supposed to be within the creative vision of the divine. They show us what, how, or who we are in essence; from which, however, we are separated or fallen into existence. Tillich firmly maintains that “actualized creation and

\[\text{(69-87).}\]

260 Within the contents of the entire work, it is: Part III.I.B. *The Transition from Essence to Existence and the Symbol of “the Fall”*, ST II, 29-44 (35-52).

261 ST II, 43 (51).


263 ST II, 39.

264 ST II, 29: “Theology must clearly and unambiguously represent ‘the Fall’ as a symbol for the human situation universally, not as the story of an event that happened ‘once upon a time’.”

265 For the designations “essential nature” and “created goodness”, see e.g. ST II, 38f (46); or “essential goodness”, see ST II, 39 (47: translated in German as: *essentieller Einheit*).

266 ST II, 44 (51): “Creation and Fall coincide in so far as there is no point in time and space in which created goodness was actualized and had existence. This is a necessary consequence of the rejection of the literal interpretation of the paradise story”.

267 ST II, 33 (39f).
estranged existence are identical”,268 emphasizing that the symbolic meaning of the fall “transcends the myth of Adam’s Fall and has universal anthropological significance”269. ‘Universal’, firstly, includes all subsequent divine creating in time, as Tillich illuminates with the example of a new-born child:

God … creates the new-born child; but, if created, it falls into the state of existential estrangement. This is the point of coincidence of creation and the Fall. But it is not a logical coincidence: for the child, upon growing into maturity, affirms the state of estrangement in acts of freedom which imply responsibility and guilt270.

The remark that the coincidence of creation and the Fall is not a logical one reveals a crucial element of Tillich’s position regarding the criticism of Niebuhr. If a coincidence is not logical there is no question of rational necessity.271 But if, still, the coincidence of creation and Fall, of existence and estrangement, is universal, namely as universal as a “cosmic event”,272 then freedom in the sense of complete indeterminacy is equally excluded. Instead, the freedom humans have is limited and finite since there is also a considerable amount of orderliness in their behaviour, proceeding from the opposite pole of freedom, namely destiny. Now, the element of destiny is seen by Tillich in close connection with the rest of nature, the surrounding universe which he also classifies as fallen.

Thus, the universal significance of the fall concerns, secondly, the non-human part of creation. Even though the transition towards existence, symbolized by Adam’s Fall, can occur “only through man”,273 Tillich insists on designating the world also as ‘fallen’, and on applying the concept of existence (in contrast to essence) similarly to the surrounding universe as to humankind.274 Against the simple separation between “guilty man” on the one hand and “innocent nature” on the other, Tillich argues that such clean division “leaves out the tragic element … in the human predicament”.275 Apparently, the notion of the “fallen world” has to serve Tillich’s ontological anthropology. He uses it in order to give substance to the ontological element of destiny as the counterpart of finite freedom. Freedom is not the freedom of indeterminacy since one’s freedom always works in interaction with transpersonal drives and influences, with biological, psychological and social powers. The universe, says Tillich with a genuinely holistic expression, “works through us as part of the universe”.276 The term

268 ST II, 44.
269 ST II, 29.
270 ST II, 44 (52).
271 Similar argumentation is seen by Tillich in Plato’s myth of the “Fall of the soul” describing the transition from essence to existence. Tillich observes with respect to Plato: “He knew that existence is not a matter of essential necessity but that it is a fact (…). If he had understood existence to be a logical implication of essence, existence itself would have appeared as essential”; ST II, 29. Apparently, Tillich considers Plato not to be and essentialist like Hegel who saw the physical and historical reality as the ‘rational unfolding’ of the absolute mind (see 8.2.1.b ).
272 ST II, 39: Although “man” is held responsible, both in non-biblical as well as in biblical myths, Tillich also holds that the Fall “is conceived as a cosmic event, as the universal transition from essential goodness to existential estrangement”.
273 See above; ST II, 39.
274 ST II, 43.
275 ST II, 41.
276 ST II, 42 (50).
fallen world represents for him the side of destiny in human freedom, the “tragic universality of existence”. It is, says Tillich, the side that was denied by Pelagius but acknowledged by all who accept some kind of “bondage of the will”.\footnote{See ST II, 41; also 43.} Clearly, Tillich’s view on human freedom was less unlimited than the borderless liberty that was attributed to the higher self/soul by the Jane Roberts (3.1.b.c).\footnote{From the standpoint of the outer ego, the inner or higher self can be seen as the gateway to unlimited freedom. On the other hand, the higher self is also seen as participating in a larger ‘multidimensional personality’ or soul which in the Sethian perspective plays a decisive role in the (reincarnation-) destiny of any self.}

From within the field of theology, Tillich was strongly criticized for overemphasizing destiny or, as especially Niebuhr called it: “fate”. Niebuhr, in his contribution to the discussion about Systematic Theology I doesn’t deny that the biblical concepts of fall and original sin contain “paradoxical relations between fate and freedom” but maintained that the emphasis lies upon freedom and responsibility, while the element of fate in them must be seen as “historical” fate and not as “ontological”.\footnote{Kegley, 255.} Some years later Niebuhr further elaborated his argument in The Self and the Dramas of History (1955).\footnote{Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History (1955); the numbers in the text refer to this work.} Although never denying the contrasting realities of freedom and determinism, of the human self as both creator and creature, his main emphasis is on the free human ‘self’ transcending natural and social causes. In many places Niebuhr dwells on “the unique capacity for freedom of the human person” (4), the “indeterminate character of the self’s capacity for transcending itself, its history and its world” (5). He criticizes the tendency of modern scientists to suppress the “radical freedom of the self and the consequent dramatic realities of history” on the one hand, and on the other hand to stress determining conditions, predictable processes and ontological patterns in order to master history and comprehend the whole drama of history as meaningful (49f). Without referring to Tillich explicitly he repeats his criticism about the transmutation of the biblical myth of the fall into “strictly ontological, rather than historical terms” (99). Under influence of Platonic philosophy, Origen was the first to commit the error – according Niebuhr - to change “the idea of a universal guilt as historical fate to an ontological one, that is, to a necessary consequence of man’s finiteness”. Such a view may effectively help finite men to get rid of their guilt feeling but it is not the “Christian concept of the drama of history” (99). Contrary to the trend of social and psychological science of his time to envision the human being as determined by natural causes, Niebuhr emphasizes individual freedom and responsibility stating that “the self is always the master, and not the servant, of its reason” (17). The self is inclined to use its “freedom over self and the communal situation” in order to ”press its claims rather than to moderate them”. This universal inclination is equated by Niebuhr with “original sin”, which is the common tendency of the self of being finally and mainly concerned with his own glory and security. Rather than in the social or societal circumstances or in the Freudian pleasure principle Id, the “resources for both love and self-love” must be located “at the very heights of human personality” (18). Self-concern and self-love are a matter of human strength and not of inertia. Sin or self-love proceeds from a man or a woman’s potency and not from their weakness. Apparently, he saw one straight line along potency – self-love – sin.

At this point Niebuhr was countered, at first rather sharply, by Carl Rogers, who was asked to comment on Niebuhr’s book.\footnote{Rogers, Dialogues (Conversations with …), 208ff. At first, commenting on Niebuhr’s work on the human self, Rogers was not at all pleased with it. No less than three distinguished confreres were asked to write mediating articles in order to create some understanding between the two coryphaei. The conciliating contributions of B.M. Loomer (Psychology of Religion), W.M. Horton (Theology) and}
Rogers identifies the central core of deficiency in people not in their having too great an amount of self-love but rather in its painful absence. According to Rogers, most people tend to “despise themselves” as worthless and unlovable: “I could not differ more deeply from the notion that self-love is the fundamental and pervasive ‘sin’” (Rogers, 211). Informed by his own practical experience, Rogers is impressed by the “unresolved tension” between both the freedom of man and the determined nature of man’s behaviour (Rogers, 224). Like Niebuhr, he desires to preserve the self as creator and as a free and self-determining being. He is convinced however that the ‘self’ can only be found in close connection with co-determining factors in the human situation. Rogers is strongly interested in finding “orderliness” in the human psyche (Rogers, 211). These discussions took place in a theological (and broader) climate of growing criticism of the traditional doctrine of ‘original—‘or ‘hereditary sin’, especially its supposed aspects of inevitable fate or determining necessity. Accepting the criticism but unwilling to abandon the doctrine, Niebuhr’s response is to emphasize the aspect of human freedom and responsibility, while leaving the other pole, the aspect of fate as he calls it, somewhat in the dark.

The interesting point in the perspective of Tillich is his attempt of explicitly holding on to both freedom and destiny. Avoiding both Pelagian and Manichaean one-sidedness, he carefully tries to steer his ship between the banks of finite freedom on the one hand and destiny on the other: their unity is regarded by him as the “great problem” of the doctrine of man, it is a “mystery” even within the ground of being which is within God (8.2.2.a). One cannot have freedom, without inter-dependently living within the larger structures of destiny.

This understanding of the freedom-destiny duality as basic characteristic of actual human existence will hardly be questioned by anyone. But whether the same duality is also present within the divine ground is a question to take along for further consideration. This may also bear on another question that has not been sufficiently answered yet, namely, to what extent the transition from essence to existence is represented adequately by the symbol of the Fall?! Why not speak of an initial attempt, a pioneering first step, or a promising adventure? Before digging deeper into these matters, I must first turn to Tillich’s view on estrangement and sin.

8.2.3 Estrangement and Sin

The ontological distinction or ‘transition from essence to existence’ was used by Tillich in the first instance to illuminate the theological notion of ‘creation’. Then both ‘transition’ and ‘creation’ were identified through the metaphor “Fall”. In my description so far, the term estrangement was used a few times as coinciding with...
the transition, and as intrinsically tied up with the Fall. Taken together it means that the transition from essence to existence, according to Tillich, always contains an element of fall; and both the Fall and the transition from essence to existence can also be described as estrangement. Thus, to a certain extent, the use of estrangement comes close to the classical concept of original sin, which is one point of attention in the present section. But estrangement is also used to describe subsequent phenomena within existence. The point is that estrangement in the first universal sense of falling into existence does not eliminate, according to Tillich, a basic and continuing “essential unity” of humankind with its ground of being. This essential unity of a person with God, one’s self, and one’s world can be either respected and honoured; or disregarded, leading to further disruption. Both the latter options belong to the second use of ‘estrangement’ which is employed by Tillich as an important tool for his reinterpretation of (actual) sin. This double and sometimes a bit elusive meaning of estrangement will be discussed secondly (8.2.3.b Multiple use of estrangement). But, firstly, I will shortly dwell on the origin of the term which Tillich derived from Hegel (8.2.3.a The term estrangement).

### 8.2.3.a The term estrangement

As a philosophical term, Tillich derived “estrangement” from Hegel, who applied the term in two ways. Most notably, in his philosophy of nature Hegel identified “nature as estranged mind”. But in his earlier work, Tillich says, the discovery of estrangement is already present to describe “life-processes as possessing an original unity which is disrupted by the split into subjectivity and objectivity and by the replacement of love by law”. In the first sense mentioned (about the later Hegel), the concept of estrangement is basically describing a progressive development, referring to a next step, a step forward in the actualization of the absolute mind (8.2.1.b). The estrangement implied in such steps was thought to be subsequently overcome by reconciliation in history. In the second and more original sense (derived from the early Hegel), estrangement was used against Hegel by some of his pupils. Marx, for instance, saw little reconciliation with respect to individuals as well as in society. Hegel’s left-wing pupils primarily saw separation and struggle, they more or less identified existence with estrangement. In this way, according to Tillich, they were

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287 ST II, 44f: “The state of existence is the state of estrangement. … The transition from essence to existence results in personal guilt and universal tragedy”.

288 Both meanings of estrangement appear in the following statement: “In every individual act the estranged or fallen character of being actualizes itself” (ST II, 38 (45). In the German translation the word “fallen” is missing). The implication of this statement is that, firstly, human being as such is “estranged or fallen” from essence into existence which is the universal human predicament right from the start. But then, secondly, every individual act that is done by someone existing may lead to further estrangement within existence.

289 ST II, 47 (55); this essential unity can be denied and to that extent ‘lost’ but not deleted, since one “belongs essentially to that from which one is estranged”, ST II, 45 (53).

290 ST II, 46 (54).

291 ST II, 45 (53): as a philosophical term, estrangement was “created and applied” by Hegel. According to Pannenberg the term was much older and was also part of Christianity’s own theological and biblical heritage, see: Pannenberg, Anthropologie, 260f. Thus, there was no need to base the origin of the term on Hegel, as observed by Pannenberg, Systematische Theologie Bd.II, 207.

292 ST II, 45.
existentialists ahead of their time. In their perspective the human being is alienated from his or her true being, implying that “man as he exists is not what he essentially is and ought to be”. For Tillich himself, it is precisely this two sidedness which makes the notion so useful and adequate to describe human existence in its relationship to ultimate reality.

The profundity of the term estrangement is the implication that one belongs essentially to that from which one is estranged. Man is not a stranger to his true being, for he belongs to it. He is judged by it but cannot be completely separated, even if he is hostile to it. Man’s hostility to God proves indubitably that he belongs to him.

Clearly, the term ‘estrangement’ is very well suited to explicate the divine-human relationship both in its ontological, essential identity and in its existential antagonism. On the one hand it can be combined with Tillich’s mystical apriori and its presupposition concerning the closeness, if not unity between God and the soul (8.1.2.a (introductory words)). On the other hand, it can also be used to describe the actuality of separation and even opposition between God and the human beings. It is to this latter aspect which is traditionally described in the doctrine of sin that I will now turn.

8.2.3.b Multiple use of the notion Estrangement

The term estrangement stands for a highly evocative concept. It is favoured by Tillich as a general, philosophical characterization of human existence at large; theologically, it is used to explain the concept of sin, both original and actual sin. At all levels, estrangement seems to illuminate in particular the destiny side of existence, and in particular of sin. First, I will describe how estrangement is used, on the one hand, to indicate the general predicament of human existence; and on the other, to denote subsequent human behaviour through which the original predicament of estrangement is actualized. The two sides correspond with the traditional distinction between original and actual sin, renamed by Tillich as sin/estrangement as fact and as act (i). In addition to being a near equivalent of sin, estrangement is further presented by Tillich as tool for the interpretation of the religious meaning of sin (ii).

8.2.3.b.1 Estrangement as act and as fact, original and actual

The notion estrangement serves in the first place to capture the predicament of existence after the Fall. As such it comes close to original sin. But it is also used to describe further developments within existence, thery approximating actual sin. Thus, a section on “estrangement and sin” is introduced by Tillich as follows.

The state of existence is the state of estrangement. Man is estranged from the ground of his being, from other beings, and from himself. The transition from essence to existence
results in personal guilt and universal tragedy. It is now necessary to give a description of existential estrangement and its self-destructive implications.296

In the first part of this quotation, estrangement refers to the original and general state of existence as it emerges from the transition or fall. To come into being and exist as a human implies or presupposes the separation from the realm of essences. One is estranged from God, world and self – all three considered in their essential perfection. Then, however, the transition seems to result, as if in one stroke, into subsequent existential estrangement in the form of personal guilt and tragedy, developing within a human life and on the soil of the original state of estrangement. Both guilt and tragedy result from the self-destructive implications of the original estrangement. They are forms of actual estrangement taking place within existence. To the extent that the destructive or damaging phenomena of estrangement are fostered by tragic events or circumstances, they will be discussed under the heading of evil (8.2.4). But in so far as the accumulation of estrangement proceeds from responsible human choices, made in finite freedom, there is guilt, theologically addressed with the word sin.

While stating and restating that the word ‘sin’ cannot be abandoned, Tillich barely hides his preference for the notion ‘estrangement’.297 Still, he admits the indispensable function of the word “sin” because it expresses what is not implied in the term ‘estrangement’, namely the personal act of turning away from that to which one belongs. Sin expresses most sharply the personal character of estrangement over against its tragic side. It expresses personal freedom and guilt in contrast to tragic guilt and the universal destiny of estrangement. The word ‘sin’ … accusingly points to the element of personal responsibility in one’s estrangement. Man’s predicament is estrangement, but his estrangement is sin. It is not a state of things, like the laws of nature, but a matter of both personal freedom and universal destiny.298

Presumably with the criticism of his friend Niebuhr in mind, Tillich seems eager to reinforce the element of personal responsibility and freedom. Counter to the accusation of changing sin into “ontological fate”, he emphasizes that estrangement, as the more tragic or destiny side, and sin as the active side based on freedom, belong together. The original human predicament of estrangement, as well as all the subsequent existential dynamics, are driven by both destiny and freedom. In fact, this pair of ontological elements recurs at all levels as predicament and subsequent action, as estrangement and sin, as original and actual sin.

Now, the latter distinction of theological tradition is recaptured by Tillich in a section entitled “Estrangement as Fact and as Act”.299 The predicates ‘original’ and ‘hereditary’ (Erbsünde) in connection with sin need to be abandoned. Since Adam and Eve before the fall must not be taken as a historical couple, they must be seen, according to Tillich “as essential man and as symbolizing the transition from essence to

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296 ST II, 44f (52); similarly note 231.

297 Showing Tillich’s ambivalence, see ST II, 46; after illustrating the implicitly biblical character of the term, Tillich goes on saying: “Nevertheless, ‘estrangement’ cannot replace ‘sin’. Yet the reasons for attempts to replace the word ‘sin’ with another word are obvious”.

298 ST II, 46 (54).

299 ST II, 55 (64): section “5. Estrangement as Fact and as Act”. Although the term sin is to be maintained – as Tillich had stated – he most often makes use of estrangement as simply synonymous to sin.
existence”. In their fall they represent “the universal destiny of estrangement”. Their myth symbolizes the predicament of “every man” but this predicament is “neither original nor hereditary”. Therefore, Tillich suggests to leave the old indications and, instead, distinguish between sin as act and as fact:

Sin as an individual act actualizes the universal fact of estrangement. As an individual act, sin is a matter of freedom, responsibility and personal guilt. But this freedom is imbedded in the universal destiny of estrangement in such a way that in every free act the destiny of estrangement is involved and, vice versa, that the destiny of estrangement is actualized by all free acts.300

The last statement that estrangement is actualized by “all free acts” might very well rekindle criticism like Niebuhr’s. Especially the word “all” seems to imply fatefulness. It suggests that with all we do, we can only add further estrangement to the original predicament of existence; that all human behaviour is inevitably re-establishing the sin. This would be an unequivocal recapturing of non posse non peccare in terms of estrangement. Tillich’s main point, however, is the inextricable unity of freedom and destiny which is also a unity of the two sides of sin, namely between estrangement as fact and as act. This unity becomes palpable in the “immediate experience of everyone who feels himself to be guilty” of extending estrangement, even in case something happens against one’s will. We often have guilt-feeling even when we are perfectly aware that our conscious acts do only partly depend on our individual decisions. What we actually do, says Tillich, depends on our whole being, consisting of our present, past, and future. It co-depends on our own destiny and on “mankind’s universal, destiny”.301 This implies on the one hand, that we can have a real awareness of guilt even when there is no direct or exclusive responsibility.302

Apparently, Tillich’s holistic doctrine of universal estrangement need not make our consciousness of guilt unreal. Nor does it provide for an easy excuse. On the other hand, the analysis of estrangement can liberate us from the “unrealistic assumption” that we are individually in charge, and fully free and capable all the time. It is not with undetermined freedom that we make our decisions, either “for good or bad, for God or against him”.303 Thus, the unity of (limited) freedom and destiny is reconfirmed as the all underlying secret, or ‘mystery’ of being a human (see 8.2.2.b). The inextricable togetherness of ethical freedom and tragic destiny forever is “the great problem of man”.304

300 ST II, 56.
301 ST II, 56 (65).
302 See ST II, 59 (68), where Tillich dwells on the correlation between individual and collective estrangement: “The citizens of a city are not guilty of the crimes committed in their city [by others]; but they are guilty as participants in the destiny of man as a whole and in the destiny of their city in particular; for their acts in which freedom was united with destiny have contributed to the destiny in which they participate. They are guilty, not of committing the crimes of which their group is accused, but of contributing to the destiny in which these crimes happened. In this sense, even the victims of tyranny in a nation are guilty of this tyranny”. It is interesting to compare Tillich’s holistic experience of reality with Schleiermacher’s “feeling of absolute dependence”, to which it comes close, especially when formulating Schleiermacher’s holistic dependency as ‘feeling of all-embracing inter-dependency’ which it largely is (fio).
303 ST II, 57 (66).
304 ST II, 38 (45): “Existence is rooted both in ethical freedom and in tragic destiny. If the one or the other side is denied, the human situation becomes incomprehensible. Their unity is the great problem of the
8.2.3.b.ii Estrangement as religious interpretation of sin

Apart from representing the more destiny or tragic side and complement of sin, the concept of estrangement is also presented as tool for interpretation and for recovering the basically religious meaning of sin. According to Tillich, the essence of sin has largely been lost in the Christian churches. In the biblical perspective on sin as viewed by St. Paul, sin is used in the singular and seen as a “quasi-personal power”, influencing humans and ruling the world. But in both Catholic and Protestant churches the term sin is mostly used in the plural, “sins”, defined as trespasses or deviations from the prescriptions by the Church and from moral laws. Sin, however, does not primarily concern our relationship to ecclesiastical, moral, or social authorities, but to God. And this essentially religious or theological character of sin is aptly expressed in the term estrangement. As an evocative image, estrangement perfectly captures the innermost substance of sin which is the “disruption of the essential unity with God”. What makes an act sinful is not disobedience to a rule or law. Instead it is what Tillich would prefer to call “unfaith” if the word existed; what the reformers called “unbelief”, namely the “disruption of man’s cognitive participation in God”. By consequence, the essence of sin is “man’s estrangement from God, from men, from himself”. The conclusion is that the word sin is to be maintained to indicate human responsibility, the aspect of personal culpability in turning away from God. In reality, however, sin is always “freedom and destiny in one and the same act”. As a result, Tillich most often follows his own preference by using estrangement in place of sin.

To summarize the previous discussions, I conclude that the appeal of the term estrangement is its descriptive and evocative strength. In a general sense, estrangement describes the nature of sin as part of human destiny. More specifically, it is used by Tillich in three ways. Firstly, referring to the creative transition, estrangement describes diagnostically the common or universal situation of human existence that emerges from the essential realm. As such, estrangement is a fact of life and comes close to the predicament traditionally designated with ‘original sin’. Within this predicament, secondly, estrangement describes an aspect of actual sin, namely its aspect of tragedy over against its aspect of personal responsibility. Thirdly, the term is a symbolic expression of the theological essence of sin which Tillich identifies as estrangement between God and humankind. Sin is thus interpreted as separation between two entities that ontologically belong together, since God and the individual human soul are originally one. It is must be cleared, however, what the assumed unity soul-God implies with respect to the relationship God-human person, and more in particular

document of man”.
305 ST II, 46 (54).
306 ST II, 49 (57).
307 ST II, 48 (56).
308 ST II, 47 (55: Im Akt des Unglaubens wird die Erkenntnis-Einheit mit Got zerrissen).
309 ST II, 46f (54f).
310 See also ST II, 47 (55), on estrangement as “unbelief”: “Man in actualizing himself, turns to himself and away from God in knowledge, will and emotion …”, see note 308.
311 See 8.1.2.a.i, Tillich’s approving reference to Meister Eckhart about the soul as “not only equal with God but it is … the same that He is”, Theology of Culture, 14f.
what picture of the human person results from this. Therefore, in the next coming
intermediate paragraph, I will pay some attention to this anthropological question, in
particular concerning the concept of personhood (§ 9. Taking Stock II - Some main
concepts of personhood).

8.2.4 Estrangement and evil

Up to and including the first volume of Systematic Theology (1951), Tillich does not use the term evil frequently. Instead, in philosophical discourse he prefers
the more neutral, logical term ‘nonbeing’, while using the religious symbol ‘the de-
memonic’ in theological speech. It may have been the criticism of Niebuhr and others
that induced him to enter more explicitly into the terminology of ‘evil’, as he did in
the second volume of Systematic Theology that appeared in 1957. In his famous Terry
Lectures, held in 1950/51 at Yale University, Tillich used the concept of ‘courage’ as
a key to the interpretation of being and nonbeing. He described courage as “self-affirmation in spite of something”, and this something against which courage stands is
the threat of non-being. Courage strives for life, it “opens the door to being”, but when
one goes through this door, one simultaneously “finds … being and the negation of be-
ing and their unity”. Therefore, an ontology of courage must include an ontology of
anxiety, which is “awareness of nonbeing”. This awareness is “existential” because,
far from being abstract or distant knowledge, anxiety is awareness that “nonbeing is
a part of one’s own being”. The interdependence of courage and anxiety reflects a
holistic view on the opposite poles of being and nonbeing closely belonging together.
In what follows I will discuss the relevant aspects of this Tillichean holism, firstly the
interconnection between being and nonbeing (8.2.4.a), secondly between the holy and
demonic (8.2.4.b), thirdly the ontological place of anxiety as related to nonbeing
(8.2.4.c), and finally the role of anxiety with respect to the development and experience of evil (8.2.4.d).

8.2.4.a Nonbeing as related to being

In a general sense, Tillich maintains that nonbeing is dependent on the being it ne-
gates. One reason for this dependency is that negation is logically impossible without
a preceding affirmation. Therefore, Tillich speaks of the “ontological priority of being
over nonbeing”. The latter is dependent on the former in all respects, as indicated
already in the term non-being itself. Thus, the dependency of nonbeing is also valid
with respect to special qualities of being. Since nonbeing has no quality of its own, it
derives its quality from the being it negates. Tillich distinguished three main quali-
ties of being that match with three forms of self-affirmation or courage, namely ontic,
spiritual and moral self-affirmation. Accordingly, he sees three forms of nonbeing that

312 This is also true for CIB (1952).
313 Thus, Tillich took ‘courage’ not as a moral category in the sense of moral standing or noble bravery,
but used it as an ontological category, a deep rooted attitude as is visible e.g., in Nietzsche’s “will
to power”, see CIB, 24f.; also 26f: “Nietzsche’s will to power is … neither will in the psychological
sense nor power in the sociological sense. It designates the self-affirmation of life as life, including
self-preservation and growth”. Thus, Tillich takes ‘courage’ above all as the “concept of ontological
self-affirmation” (CIB, 31).
314 CIB, 32.
315 CIB, 35.
316 CIB, 40.
are oppositely directed. Fate and death represent the threat of ontic nonbeing; emptiness and meaninglessness are forms of spiritual nonbeing; guilt and condemnation are expressions of moral nonbeing.\(^{317}\) Below I will discuss these varieties of nonbeing in connection with the traditional forms of evil (8.2.4. e Anxiety and nonbeing).

The reality and structure of nonbeing do not result from a merely logical play of saying ‘no’, or adding the little word ‘non’, where being says ‘yes’. Nonbeing is itself “rooted in an ontological structure”.\(^{318}\) Thus, partly in contradiction to having stated its dependency, Tillich also held that nonbeing is “ontologically as basic as being”, which he perceived in the ‘philosophies of life’, in their interpretation of being “in terms of life or process or becoming”.\(^{319}\) Actually, Tillich considered the concept of nonbeing as practically omnipresent in the history of philosophy.\(^{320}\)

If one is asked how nonbeing is related to being-itself, one can only answer metaphorically: being ‘embraces’ itself and nonbeing. Being has nonbeing ‘within’ itself as that which is eternally present and eternally overcome in the process of the divine life. The ground of ‘everything that is’ is not a dead identity without movement and becoming; it is living creativity. Creatively it affirms itself, eternally conquering its own nonbeing. As such it is the pattern of the self-affirmation of every finite being and the source of the courage to be.\(^{321}\)

Nonbeing and being are so closely linked together that there even seems to be a matter of reciprocal dependency. Nonbeing is secondary to being but being depends on nonbeing as well. Qualities of being, as life and movement, creativity and becoming, are incited and activated by nonbeing which proofs nonbeing to be indispensably useful to being.

Being [the power of being] could not be the ground of life without nonbeing. The self-affirmation of being without nonbeing would not even be self-affirmation but an immovable self-identity. Nothing would be manifest, nothing expressed, nothing revealed. But nonbeing drives being out of its seclusion, it forces it to affirm itself dynamically.\(^{322}\)

Apparently, nonbeing, though secondary in relationship to being and therefore dependent on it, is also some kind of eliciting force or catalytic agent that induces being to be. Being and nonbeing seem to cooperate. Without the latter, being would be less or even non-creative. What Tillich actually had in mind can be illuminated with a distinction he made in the first volume of his main work, but which is not yet present in \textit{Courage to be}.\(^{323}\) It concerns the distinction between nonbeing as \textit{ouk on} and nonbeing as \textit{mè on}. The first type of nonbeing is the “nothing” without any re-
lation to being; the second is nonbeing which has a dialectical relation to being. The nonbeing pictured in the quote is of the second type. It is not-yet-being as indicated in the mé-ontic matter of Platonism. The dialectical relation of this nonbeing (mé on) is given with its “potentiality of being”. As such, that is, with its potentiality, it must be situated between being and absolute nothingness (ouk on). Tillich gives the example of “dynamics” which is one of his “ontological elements”. Dynamics “cannot be thought as something that is; nor … as something that is not”. As potentiality, it is “nonbeing in contrast to things that have a form”, and as such it is less than being. On the other hand, it represents “power of being in contrast to pure nonbeing”. Thus, Tillich’s nonbeing (mé on) can adequately be designated as ‘relative nonbeing’ standing somewhere between being on the one hand and pure nonbeing or absolute nothingness (ouk on) on the other. Actually, relative or dialectical nonbeing is practically “identical with finitude”.327

Considering the creation process, Tillich admitted that the Christian doctrine of creatio ex nihilo is opposed to the idea of mé ontic matter as element or second principle for creation. It teaches that God created from nothing (ouk on), from the undialectical negation of being. Nevertheless, as Tillich observes, relative nonbeing (mé on) underlies most creation mythologies, including the one in the bible. Mé ontic matter “is indicated in the chaos, in the tohu-vá-bohu … preceding creation”. Moreover, says Tillich, relative nonbeing has even been placed within God himself, as with Boehme’s Ungrund, Schelling’s first potency (a blind primeval necessary being), Schopenhauer’s unconscious ‘will to live’ etc. Nonbeing is dialectically related to being-itself, and consequently to God. If God is the living God, and the ground of creation, and there is no negative principle in addition to him then, Tillich asks rhetorically: “how can one avoid positing a dialectical negativity in God himself?”. Therefore, Christian theology had to strip nonbeing of its independence and “seek a place for it in the depth of the divine life”. This ‘depth’ can come to awareness in life as the “stigma” of finitude; or even as a “shock” of nonbeing. Both reveal “the abysmal element in the ground of being”, and thus in God.

Moreover, Tillich opposes those who deprive nonbeing of its dialectical character in relationship to being and, instead, place being and nonbeing, taken as nothingness (ouk on) in “absolute contrast”. This would wrongly imply that “nonbeing is excluded from being in every respect; everything is excluded except being itself (i.e., the whole

324 ST I, 188 (220).
325 Tillich distinguished three pairs of polar elements that he saw as constituting the ontological structure of existential reality. These three pairs of “ontological elements” are “Individualization and Participation”, “Dynamics and Form”, “Freedom and Destiny”, see ST I, 164f (194f); 174-186 (206-218).
326 ST I, 179 (211).
327 ST I, 191 (224).
328 ST I, 188 (220).
329 ST I, 179 (211).
330 ST I, 188f (221); In Is vragen naar zin vragen naar God (1993), 82, Stoker disagrees with Tillich and responds equally rhetorically: “Heeft God zo niet een dubbel gelaat … ? Similarly, in his contribution “Nature good and Evil, a theological evaluation”, in: Drees, (ed.), Is Nature ever Evil? 203-213, 205: According to Stoker, when non-being, the negative, or evil is so directly linked to God, then “it seems difficult to avoid the notion of God as a split being”.
331 ST I, 179f (211).
332 ST I, 110 (133); Tillich observes further that this negative side is always “potentially present” and even “a necessary element in revelation. Without it the mystery would not be mystery”.

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world is excluded). But in Tillich’s view there “can be no world unless there is dialectical participation of nonbeing in being”. What is more, the concept of nonbeing as absolute, as totally separated from being, would grant it autonomy and raise it to the rank of a “negative principle in addition to him”. Clearly, Tillich does not want this which reminds us to Matthew Fox refusing to admit the reality of “(gross) evil” in his discussion with Sheldrake (5.1.a).

As to Tillich, he considers the concept of absolute nonbeing as an “ontological attempt to avoid the mystery of nonbeing”. He may be responding here to Karl Barth’s doctrine of nothingness (das Nichtige), which I have discussed in the previous chapter (7.2.1.a). For Tillich, absolute nonbeing (ouk on-nothingness–das Nichts–das Nichtige) is a purely theoretical concept, a strategy to evade the uneasy mystery that nonbeing cannot really be kept away: neither from being, nor from God. Since nonbeing causes anxiety, it is a reality and therefore must be addressed. Theologically, this means that nonbeing is also present in God. Tillich even claims that, just as nonbeing enlivens being, so it is nonbeing in God that “makes God a living God”.

The divine Yes would be “lifeless” if there were no countering ‘No’ to overcome. This really is the challenging element in Tillich’s view on the demonic.

8.2.4.b THE DEMONIC AND THE DIVINE/HOLY

What has been stated regarding nonbeing as related to being similarly applies to the demonic as related to the divine, since according to Tillich “the divine embraces itself and the demonic”. Participation of the demonic or anti-divine principle in the power of the divine is attested in the Bible, as well as in the history of Christianity. Luther did include demonic elements in his doctrine of God. Calvin, on the other hand, did not grant the demonic its place within the realm of divine holiness; later Cal-

333 ST I, 187 (220).
334 ST I, 189: the rejection of dualism, stating a negative principle besides God, is more or less common sense in the history of theology; and apparently also taken for granted by Tillich.
335 ST I, 187 (220).
336 CTB, 180; cf. also ST I, 250f. (288f) where it is stated on the one hand that God is the living God “because he is Spirit” and on the other hand that it is the divine “abyss” or “depth” which “as the basis of the Godhead … makes God God”. The divine “abyss” and “depth” are symbols of the “majesty, the unapproachable intensity …, the inexhaustible ground of his being”. It is in this abysmal divine depth where the divine power of being is “infinitely resisting nonbeing, giving the power of being to everything that is”. Clearly, the terms abyss, depth, power, ground of being on the one hand, and nonbeing on the other, have an undeniable closeness and at least partial overlap of meaning in Tillich’s thought.
337 ST I, 218 (254).
338 CTB,34; Tillich points to “the dramatic centres of the biblical story”. He may have had in mind e.g. Exod.4,21 (God deliberately hardening the heart of pharaoh); I Chron.21,1 / II Sam.24,1 (Satan or the Lord); Job 1,6 (where Satan is one amongst the “sons of God”); encounters of Jesus with ‘unclean spirits’ e.g. Mk. 3,11ff; 5,1ff; Acts 16,6 (Paul is forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia).
339 ST I, 217 (253). So did the Lutheran theosophical author Boehme (1575-1624) whose thinking shows “a dialectical progression from the simplicity of the divine source to a worldly multiplicity … of good and evil, to a resolution and synthesis, with a restored eschatological unity which is projected back onto a transcendent plane” (cited from: DGWE, 187). Also: “Evil, though not part of the ‘pure divinity’ appears to have a counterpart in a divine evolution that is eternal and transcendent, yet also projected into and realized by transient nature and humankind in history” (DGWE, 190). In Boehme’s era of religious wars and apparent inevitability of evil, the divine “transcendent plane” is often designated as the Ungrund, signifying the deep mystery of a good and omnipotent God, yet allowing or even causing evil.
vinism tended to strictly separate both realms. But according to Tillich, such a strict separation of the demonic from the divine implies “the end of the numinous character of the holy”. Philosophically, the acceptance of demonic traits within the divine came to the surface in later Romanticism as it developed a new perspective on the negative and the demonic. The dimension of the infinite came to be seen as no longer the exclusive dimension of divine height, but also of demonic depth. This led in the realm of philosophy and literature to a kind of “demonic realism”, strongly influencing existentialism and depth psychology. The demonic as the unconscious depth was seen as “not unambiguously negative” and as “part of the creative power of being”. While early Romanticism had acknowledged “the presence of the infinite within the finite”, later Romanticism discovered “the demonic within the finite”. Thus, “demonic realism” implies both the affirmation of one’s own unconscious demonic depth and also the presence of the demonic in the divine, namely as “the ambiguous ground of the creative”.

In an early treatise, “The Demonic” (“Das Dämonische” -1926) Tillich had identified the demonic as “the unity of form-creating and form-destroying strength” (81, (G.W. VI, 45)). He pointed to Dostoevsky’s character of the Grand Inquisitor as most impressive example, symbolizing the demonic will to power of a religion “which makes itself absolute and therefore must destroy the saint in whose name it is established” (80, (44)). In this sense, the adjective demonic is the predication of any “claim of something conditioned to be unconditioned”. In his early treatise Tillich had further distinguished the demonic from the satanic. While the former was said to comprise the (creative) tension between both creation and destruction, the latter was a symbol of only “destruction … without creation” (80, (45)). Even though in myths Satan has often been depicted as the Head of the demons, ontologically speaking “he is the negative principle contained in the demonic” (81, (45)). In strongly religious (or Puritan) times the demonic is equated with the satanic to the extent that its creative potency disappears or is completely denied. According to Tillich however, the “depth of the demonic is the dialectical quality in it” (82). Tillich saw a similar tension in certain pre-classic art: “the embracing form which unites in itself a formative and a from-destroying element” (80). So it seems that Tillich, two and

340 Tillich further observes that later Calvinism tended to identify the holy with the “clean”, demanding obedience to the divine law and moral justice; by contrast, the “unclean” came to represent the immoral (as in Puritanism). Originally however, as Tillich points out, the unclean was close to the demonic, producing taboos and numinous awe. “Divine and demonic holiness were not distinguished” then. They only became separated under the influence of prophetic criticism (ST I, 217). This etymology of close connection between the unclean and the demonic is confirmed e.g., in Mk. 5,12-13, where pneumata ta akatharta (unclean spirits) are alternated with pantes `oi daimones (translated in the King James Bible as “unclean spirits” and “all the devils”, respectively.

341 ST I, 217; Tillich observes that the aspect of tremendum changed into fear of law and judgment, while the fascinosum could easily become pride of self-control and repression.

342 ENGW II, 70: In der Spätromantik geschah etwas Neues: hier wurde die Dimension, in der das Unendliche liegt, nicht nur als Dimension des Göttlichen gesehen, sondern auch, sozusagen von der Höhe in die Tiefe verlegt, als Dimension des Dämonischen

343 CtB, 122.

344 ENGW II, 71: „Nachdem die Frühromantik die Gegenwart des Unendlichen im Endlichen erkannt hatte, entdeckte die Spätromantik das Dämonische im Endlichen“.

345 CtB, 122.


347 ST I, 227 (264).

348 “The demonic”, 80; this dialectic was (perhaps too) eloquently expressed in the original German text
half decades after his early treatise, had moved this twofold, dialectical quality from the realm of the demonic towards the realm of the divine.\textsuperscript{349}

The challenging element in Tillich’s later concept of the demonic is its localization and function within God, the supposition that it has a part in the creativity and power of the divine. Clearly, this is a perspective that would very much upset a student of AGiM. The same potentially worrying point is valid with respect to the position and function of nonbeing within being itself. The disquieting aspect becomes clear, when the demonic is defined as “the structural and therefore inescapable power of evil” of which it is the mythical expression.\textsuperscript{350} This disturbing aspect can be felt when one becomes aware “that nonbeing is a part of one’s own being”.\textsuperscript{351}

Clearly, to localize nonbeing and the demonic inside one’s own being, even inside the ground of being, in being-itself, and thus inside of God has an alarming effect, which, on the one hand may also be activating (8.2.4.a). But having ‘negativity’ as it were inside your own bosom is also a menace and a threat giving cause to existential anxiety, a penetrating and deeply felt awareness, since the fact that this threat comes from within one’s own being makes it inescapable indeed. It is direct, like the awareness of God (8.1.2.a), or like any ultimate concern. Now, the existential experience of anxiety can proceed in two directions. On the one hand, it can lead to self-affirmation in spite of the threatening nonbeing. Then the nonbeing is taken upon oneself, into a courage to be, implying the potential of acquiring new being. This will be discussed in the third part of the present paragraph (8.3 Human Potential). But anxiety can also succumb to the threat of nonbeing and lose itself in the experience of evil.

8.2.4.c Anxiety and Nonbeing

Anxiety as the awareness of nonbeing can become so strong that it turns into despair in which a human being feels fully helpless to resist nonbeing. Anxiety or despair, then, becomes an experience of evil (see 8.2.4.d). But in general, anxiety is a normal awareness of some form of nonbeing. As such anxiety is distinguished by Tillich from fear (i). And anxiety can take on different forms that correspond with forms of nonbeing (ii).

8.2.4.c Anxiety and Fear (Angst und Furcht)

Given the near identification by Tillich of relative nonbeing and finitude, anxiety is also defined by him as natural awareness of “finitude, experienced as one’s own finitude”.\textsuperscript{352} Thus, anxiety is an ontological quality, like finitude.\textsuperscript{353} Both belong to

\textsuperscript{349} In such a way that, as once (1926) the symbol Satan represented the negative principle in the demonic realm, so the symbol of the demonic came to represent the negative principle – or rather the element of relative nonbeing – within God.

\textsuperscript{350} Protestant Era, xxxv; according to Tillich this symbolic meaning of the demonic was “in the centre of Luther’s experience as it was in Paul’s”.

\textsuperscript{351} CtB, 35.

\textsuperscript{352} CtB, 35f: Anxiety is one’s “natural anxiety … of nonbeing, the awareness of one’s finitude as finitude”.

\textsuperscript{353} ST I, 191 (224): “Finitude in awareness is anxiety. Like finitude, anxiety is an ontological quality”. Also: Anxiety “is dependent only on the threat of nonbeing – which is identical with finitude”.
Anxiety (Angst) must be distinguished from fear (Furcht), since the latter has a definite object which the former has not. The source of the threat of which anxiety is the awareness, is “nothingness” (das Nichts) which is not an ordinary “object”. Anxiety is rather provoked by “the negation of every object”. The threatening “nothing” to which anxiety responds, is the “unknown which by its very nature cannot be known, because it is nonbeing”. In relation to death one can fear concrete negativities like the pain of dying or the loss of beloved ones. But anxiety with respect to death is without an identifiable object. It proceeds from the “absolutely unknown ‘after death’”. It is awareness of objectless nonbeing, of “nothingness” or, in religious terms, of the threat of “eternal death”. Fears can be conquered by courage or loving participation of others, but anxiety is inevitable and in a sense unmanageable because it is aroused by the “human situation as such”. It is the anxiety of not being able to preserve one’s own being which underlies every fear and is the frightening element in it. In the moment, therefore, in which “naked anxiety” lays hold of the mind, the previous objects of fear cease to be definite objects. They appear … as symptoms of man’s anxiety. As such they are beyond the reach of even the most courageous attack upon them. This situation drives the anxious subject to establish objects of fear … because fear can be met by courage. (…). But ultimately the attempts to transform anxiety into fear are vain. The basic anxiety, the anxiety of a finite being about the threat of non being, cannot be eliminated. It belongs to existence itself.

The element of helplessness in the situation of naked anxiety borders on the element of non posse traditionally connected with original sin. Simultaneously, it provokes questions about the possibility of self-affirmation, the origin of courage to be, and the like. These questions will be discussed in the third main part of this paragraph (8.3 Human Potential). In practical reality, anxiety, although without a specific object, is not as “naked” as one might suppose, since it is always coloured by the form of nonbeing to which it ontologically responds.

8.2.4.c.ii Anxiety and forms of nonbeing

The human person is inevitably challenged in his or her self-affirmation by different forms of nonbeing. Tillich distinguished between ontic nonbeing (fate, death), spiritual nonbeing (emptiness, meaninglessness) and moral nonbeing (guilt, condemnation), each causing a corresponding form of anxiety. All these forms of anxiety are existential, they are not effected by psychic illness but belong to a normal state of
mind. Remarkably, none of the above forms of nonbeing and their corresponding anxiety have an explicit religious connotation, at least, not in the sense of considering the relationship to God. If compared to the traditional triad of evil, ontic nonbeing comes close to ‘natural evil’, moral nonbeing to ‘moral evil’, and one would expect spiritual nonbeing to be in particular associated with ‘religious evil’, namely as especially concerning the relationship with God. But this is not the case according to Tillich, since he believes that all forms of nonbeing and connected types of anxiety have religious implications, even when the relationship to God is not explicitly considered. All forms of nonbeing and consequent anxiety are resulting from alienation or estrangement from self, world or from the ultimate ground of being, religiously symbolized in God.

Taking moral nonbeing as example, anxiety of guilt and condemnations proceed from the question that is inherently asked with my existence: what do with your life, make of yourself? Not only am I the person that asks this question, but I myself am also the arbiter that judges me. Within the conditions of finitude, I must try to fulfil my destiny, to actualize my potential. Finite freedom also implies that I have “the power of acting against it, of contradicting …[my] essential being”. In the situation of estrangement from oneself this power or possibility is an “actuality” that is described by Tillich not as the result of a deliberate choice for evil, but rather as an ontological fact. This fact is the “profound ambiguity of good and evil” permeating everything one does “because it permeates [one’s] personal being as such”. In all human self-affirmation “nonbeing is mixed with being” and this ambiguity comes to (moral) awareness as the “feeling of guilt”. Since we are our own judge, this guilt feeling can drive us toward complete self-rejection, to the feeling of being condemned – not to an external punishment, but to the despair of having lost our destiny. (…) The pain of despair is that a being is aware of itself as unable to affirm itself because of the power of nonbeing.

To a large extent, at least psychologically, these experiences are commensurable to those that are gone through by traditional believers in a theistic setting. Only in traditional (Christian) religion the believer is aware of him/herself as standing in personal relationship to a personal God. With respect to the first part of the quotation: similar feelings of guilt and condemnation, of being lost are flooding the traditional believer’s mind, also self-rejection. To him, all this inner, spiritual turmoil is basically mixed with guilt or even feeling ashamed (see 7.2) before God who is experienced as the personal judge before whom he stands. According to Tillich, however, when facing moral nonbeing, one feels being condemned: though not by an external instance but by oneself, by one’s own destiny which is failed. Further, the pain of despair appears as the pain of helplessness, the inability to resist nonbeing, not to speak of making things whole and well. Despair is as high as the fire of anxiety can burn. It is characterized by Tillich with a psychological term: as a “boundary-line” situation in which

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359 *CtB*, 41.
360 *CtB*, 51.
361 *CtB*, 52.
362 *CtB*, 52f; 55.
nonbeing is felt as “absolutely victorious”.

Thus, the feeling of despair contains in particular the element of non posse traditionally attached to the predicament of original sin. But whereas this ‘original inability’ was meant to describe a supposed common state of all humanity, Tillich’s notion ‘despair’ refers to an individual state of mind or consciousness. Life is a “continuous attempt to avoid despair” and fortunately this attempt is mostly successful. Thus, whereas anxiety is universal, despair is not. Given the existential predicament of estrangement, and the fact that imminent nonbeing is always present, anxiety belongs to existence as such. In case, one succeeds in taking this anxiety upon oneself and includes it within a larger mind-set of ‘courage to be’, imminent nonbeing may even become a motive to search for or participate in New Being (see 8.3). But when anxiety becomes unmanageable and grows into despair, nonbeing is felt as evil.

8.2.4.d Anxiety and evil

In the previous section, we arrived at the issue of ‘evil’ through the dynamics of one’s anxiety as the ontological and partly subjective reaction to nonbeing. But anxiety is not itself evil, nor its first origin. Therefore, I will first describe what, according to Tillich, evil is and from where it stems (i. The nature and the origin of evil). Secondly, I will exemplify Tillich’s vision with the phenomenon of death (ii. The example of our having to die). Actually, the discussion of evil reveals a far-reaching ambiguity of two main points in Tillichean terminology, namely with respect to ‘essential being’ and ‘estrangement’. With respect to both terms I will, thirdly, suggest an adjustment (iii. Two terminological adjustments). Both the terminological ambiguities and the proposed adjustments are relevant to the criticism by Niebuhr and others discussed earlier (see 8.2.2). In an epilogue in small print I will conclude that discussion.

8.2.4.d.i The nature and the origin of evil

Anxiety is as it were the mediating awareness through which nonbeing can come to be experienced consciously as evil. But as a natural phenomenon, anxiety cannot itself be the real origin of (the awareness of) evil. The underlying cause, that is, the determining predicament which can make anxiety run wild, is the human situation of estrangement/sin. Actually, this is the first and most important feature of Tillich’s approach to evil, that he focuses on its origin and the conditions under which nonbeing comes to experience as evil. Both the origin of evil and its awareness (anxiety) are determined by existential estrangement.

The other, secondary feature of his approach is to describe what evil is according to its own dynamics or nature, namely as an immanent “structure of destruction”. In a similar way as nonbeing is enclosed within being, and the demonic within the divine, so evil appears within the structures of existence. Evil is not seen as descending from elsewhere, nor as being caused by some external force, be it divine or demonic. Instead, evil or destruction is the consequence of the structure of estrangement itself … destruction has no independent standing in the whole of reality but (...) is dependent on the structure of that in and upon

363 *CtB*, 54f.
364 *CtB*, 56.
365 See the heading under which the matter is discussed in *ST* II, 59-78 (69-87): “Existential Self-Destruction and the Doctrine of Evil”.

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which it acts destructively. Here, as everywhere in the whole of being, nonbeing is dependent on being, the negative on the positive, death on life. Therefore, even destruction has structures. It “aims” at chaos; but, as long as chaos is not attained, destruction must follow the structures of wholeness; and if chaos is attained, both structure and destruction have vanished.366

All the ontological structures and elements, including the basic polarities and the categories that give substance and coherence to finite, existential being can become distorted, or parts can work against each other, leading to some variety of “destruction”. Tillich points to the “polarity of self and world” as a principal example. Since this polarity forms the basic structure of finite human being, its distortion is also the basic “structure of destruction”, subsuming all others.367

Given this more material description of what evil is, Tillich is in doubt whether to take evil in a broad or in a narrow sense. When it is taken in the wider sense, it designates “everything negative”, in which case the notion covers all the kinds of evil that are traditionally distinguished as natural, moral and religious evil (sin). Estrangement and sin are then taken as one special form of evil next to the others.368 For Tillich, however, estrangement and sin are implicated in the transition or Fall from essence to existence. They lie at the very basis of human life and all its conditions, characteristics, and developments. To a greater or lesser extent, they determine all the decisions in the process of existential self-realization. The implication of this view is that estrangement and sin are not just one form of evil among others, but, similar as with Schleiermacher,369 they are the determining element within the experience and development of all forms of evil. For this reason Tillich wants to use the word evil in the narrower sense, namely “as the consequences of the state of sin and estrangement”. In other words, the doctrine of evil “follows” from the doctrine of sin.370 Clearly this leads us back to the first and principal aspect of Tillich’s approach to evil, namely with respect to its underlying cause or source.

To conclude this point: Tillich has a twofold perspective on evil, on the one hand concerning what it is, and on the other hand why it is. The quiddity of evil as “structure of destruction” is that elements of reality will conflict with each other. But the reason why this happens, the origin or cause, that brings this distortion about, is existential estrangement and sin. These are in Tillich’s view the real sources of the experience of evil. As a consequence, the description of the different phenomena of evil proceeds

366 ST II, 60 (69).
367 Ibid.; when a human being in his finite freedom loses himself or his world, he actually loses both, since “the loss of one necessarily includes the loss of the other”.
368 Ibid.; within this larger sense of evil, “sin is seen as one evil beside others”.
369 According to Schleiermacher, “sin is ultimately always the primary and original element, and evil the derivative and secondary (Christian Faith, 318 (§76,1)). In the statement leading into this paragraph, Schleiermacher could even state that “all evil is to be regarded as the punishment of sin” (317). Commenting, however, Schleiermacher observed that “an evil … instead of being inflicted upon a wrong-doer, rather befalls him”. His use of the word punishment is merely following “the expression of our religious consciousness in so far as we refer that connection to the absolutely living and active divine causality …” (318).
370 ST II, 61 (70); as Tillich observes, this definition of the relation between sin and evil is also helpful in dealing with the problem of theodicy. When evil is the consequence of sin, the question of theodicy must not be asked with respect to evil but sin: how could God permit sin? According to Tillich, not permitting sin would be denying mankind its very nature of (finite) freedom. Only on this basis can evil be described as “structure of self-destruction”.

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by discussing what impact estrangement can have on the various elements of his ontological edifice. I will now discuss the phenomenon of death, which is an aspect of human finitude. Death belongs to regular existence. Only under the impact of estrangement/sin can it turn evil.

8.2.4.d.ii Our having to die

Saying that death belongs to life implies acknowledging that we are “naturally mortal”. On the other hand, it is equally natural that we experience anxiety about this quality of having to die, which Tillich designates as “essential anxiety”. As “essential” phenomenon, this anxiety belongs to existence like “the beating of the heart”.

The use of the word “essential” as predication of an existential phenomenon (anxiety) is remarkable, since Tillich mostly used this word in contrast with existence. But now it turns out that the quality or element that is qualified as ‘essential’ belongs naturally and regularly to existence as it is meant to be. Anxiety is indissolubly connected with the structure of finitude that is good in itself. Finitude only becomes a structure of destruction under the conditions of estrangement (71 – references to ST II). Thus, Tillich can also speak of “essential finitude” (70,71), “essential solitude” (72), “essential doubt” (72); “essential … aloneness” and even “essential being” (!) (71). All these phenomena, predicated as essential, do not stand in contrast with existential being but are an element within existence. Highly remarkable is the fact that the combination “essential being” appears among these existential phenomena. It shows clearly that this concept is used by Tillich in two meanings that must be distinguished. Above (in 8.2.2) we have encountered the essential realm as a pre-real state of potential being, as it were preceding the transition or fall towards actual existence. This I will designate as essential being in the first sense. But it appears that ‘essential being’, analogous to ‘essential anxiety’, ‘essential finitude’ etc., can also refer to a possible and actual moment within human existence. This I will designate as second sense. This double use by Tillich is not always easy to catch. Therefore, in the following discussion and especially in the next section (iii), I will offer clarification and suggest a terminological adjustment.

In connection to anxiety, the predicate ‘essential’ means, to put it plainly, that there is nothing wrong with this anxiety; instead, that essential anxiety is the normal, ontological reaction to (a form of) nonbeing. But under the conditions of estrangement, normal anxiety in the face of nonbeing may change into “horror of death”, which is reinforced by the element of guilt. Although separation from the eternal, the loss of one’s potential eternity is a matter of “universal tragic actuality”, one can still feel responsible for it and therefore, guilty. If so, a person feels all the more dominated by his finitude and is thrown back in an anxiety which “makes death an evil, a structure

371 Thus Tillich describes at length what estrangement does to the basic ontological structure of self-world (ST II, 59-62 (69-71)), to the ontological elements (62-66 (72-76)), to the categories of finitude: death and guilt, time, space (66-70 (76-79)), and to some other basic facets of human life, namely the experience of suffering and loneliness; and of doubt and meaninglessness (70-75 (80-84)).

372 ST II, 66.

373 ST II, 67 (77); numbers in the following small print intermezzo refer to ST II.

374 See ST II, 71 (81), where Tillich speaks about participation of a self in his/her world: “In the state of essential being the participation is limited by finitude, but participation is not prevented by rejection”. Clearly, ‘essential being’ is described here as a realistic moment in real life. I will return to this point further on in this section.

375 ST II, 67.
of destruction". It is vital to realize, however, that Tillich does not see estrangement/ sin and subsequent guilt feeling as the cause but definitely as the “sting” of death. Sin does not produce our having to die, but “gives death the power which is conquered only in participation in the eternal”.

The conclusion is that the phenomenon of death, though in itself a matter of essential finitude, can be transmuted into “existential evil” under the impact of actual estrangement or sin. This happens when a living person is, remains, or becomes further divorced from the eternal ground of being, be it because of a tragic development or by his/her own deliberate choice. Tillich, thereby, strongly emphasizes the importance of maintaining a sharp distinction between finitude and estrangement. Now, the import of this distinction has more weight than it looks.

8.2.4.d.III Two terminological adjustments

The phenomenon of suffering is a natural or essential element of finitude as is death. I will use Tillich’s discussion of it to suggest two terminological adjustments; and on that basis conclude the discussion with regard to the controversy with Niebuhr and others. With respect to ‘suffering’, Tillich observes in an ambiguous passage that

it [suffering] is not removed but is transformed into blessedness in the state of dreaming innocence. Under the conditions of existence (italics ffo) man is cut off from this blessedness, and suffering lays hold of him in a destructive way. Suffering becomes a structure of destruction – an evil.

The use of the symbolic expression “state of dreaming innocence” in this place is needlessly ambiguous and obscuring, since it is defined elsewhere as referring to a pre-real state as symbolized in Adam before the fall. But taken in this sense, the statement in the first line of the quotation becomes a platitude, something like saying that there is no suffering of evil in paradise. Therefore, I assume that it is used here synonymous to “essential being” in the second sense (8.2.4.d.ii) as an element or quality within existence. Even so, the second part of the quoted passage cannot but invite criticism, since Tillich states without reservation that under the conditions of existence the human being “is cut off from … blessedness, and suffering lays hold of him in a destructive way”. In this way, existence is presented as inevitably involving estrangement and sin, which, consequently, is the unfailing cause or source of evil, destructive suffering. It seems that, in conformity with Niebuhr’s and others’ allegations, temporal existence is really framed as eo ipso or ontologically evil.

Without mentioning this criticism Tillich still seems to respond to it, namely by demarcating Christianity from Eastern religions, especially Buddhism. Whereas Til-

376 ST II, 68.
377 ST II, 67; according to Tillich the idea that death would have entered human existence through the Fall, the latter having “physically changed the cellular or psychological structure of man … is absurd and unbiblical”.
378 ST II, 68.
379 ST II, 70 (80).
380 In ST II, 33 (40), Tillich observes with respect to ‘dreaming innocence’: “Both words point to something that precedes actual existence. It has potentiality, not actuality. It has no place, it is ou topos (utopia). It has no time; it precedes temporality, and it is supra-historical”. Tillich also considers the metaphor dreaming “adequate in describing the state of essential being".
lich himself was criticized for equating *existence* with evil. Buddhism is censured now by him for equating *finitude* with evil. Buddhism fails to make the vital distinction, says Tillich, between “suffering as an element of essential finitude” and “suffering as an element of existential estrangement”.\(^3\) We may wonder whether or to what extent Tillich tried to pass the problem on to Buddhism by means of this substitution of ‘finitude’ for ‘existence’, since it seems impossible to imagine ‘finitude’ without ‘existence’ and vice versa. What I intend to say is this: if it makes sense to speak of “essential finitude” as opposed to distorted finitude due to estrangement and sin, it should be equally possible to speak of ‘essential existence’ as opposed to sin-distorted or estranged existence. This distinction however, which in my view would imply a terminological improvement and clarification, Tillich never makes. And this is precisely the point where critics like Niebuhr can forward their charge. But Tillich *did* make a related though again ambiguous distinction in a passage which is largely parallel to the previous one. After stating that existence is full of moments of suffering without meaning to the one who suffers, he observes that

such a situation, of course, is not implied in *essential being* (italics ff). It is based on the transition from essence to existence and on the conflicts which follow from the self-actualization of being in encounters with beings. It is implied in *existence* (italics ff)\(^3\).

As such, this passage is obscure, ambiguous, and likely to cause a full misunderstanding. Especially the last line stating that meaningless suffering “is implied in existence”, again, suggests the criticized view on evil as ontological fate and existence as *eo ipso* evil. I will argue that what Tillich actually tries to say here becomes clear when “essential being” in the first line is interpreted as ‘essential existence’, and “existence” in the last line is read as ‘estranged existence’ (or ‘distorted existence’). This I will now explain.

The notion “essential being” is used by Tillich analogous to the “state of dreaming innocence” in the previous cadre-quotation. It must be taken in the second sense as explained in the previous section (ii), describing a possibility within human life. Because if taken as ‘essential being-before-the-transition’ (first sense), the statement (that meaningless suffering is not implied in it) would again be a platitude. Thus, essential being in this quotation refers to a moment within human life, it is part of existence. I would imagine that such an instance of “essential being” becomes actual, e.g., when a form of suffering one has to face, is not enlarged or worsened under the influence of estrangement or sin, but is met with a calm and confident mind, is supported by the power of one’s ground of being, and carried with participating support of fellow humans. Given this example, the ambiguity or contradiction in the quoted passage is that the first and the last line are contradictory. The first states that senseless suffering is not implied in essential being, which means that it is not necessarily implied in (essential) existence,\(^3\) whereas the last sentence says that it *is* implied in

\(^{3}\) *ST II*, 70; I note that one can demand with equal right that a distinction should be made between ‘suffering as an element of existence’ and ‘suffering as an element of estrangement or sin’; that is to say, to distinguish between existence and estrangement/sin/evil, which is precisely the point made by Niebuhr.

\(^{3}\) *ST II*, 71 (81: the German translation is here lapidary, or incomplete).

\(^{3}\) To the extent that essential being (in the second sense like essential anxiety, essential finitude etc.) is a moment of life within existence, but without senseless suffering, such suffering cannot be said to be necessarily implied in existence. Even then, I am aware of Tillichean expressions seemingly suggesting
existence. The passage can be reformulated more clearly when saying in the first line that the situation of senseless suffering is ‘not implied in essential existence’; and in the last line, based on the transition and on occurring existential conflicts, that such a situation is implied in ‘estranged existence’. Just like Tillich urged Buddhism to distinguish between finitude and evil, that is, between essential finitude and finitude which is distorted through estrangement or sin, he should himself distinguish accordingly between existence and evil, namely between ‘essential existence’ versus ‘actually estranged existence’ or ‘sin-distorted existence’. This is my first terminological adjustment.

But the use of estrangement (and correlates) as qualification of existence requires a second clarification, since the notion of estrangement is also used by Tillich in two meanings that are not always clearly distinguished. In one sense, the notion ‘estrangement’ is used to qualify the predicament of existence at large. What exists is no longer included within the realm of essences. It finds itself in the position of ‘estrangement as fact’ (8.2.3.h.i) which until this point reflects a step or a Fall that is ontologically inevitable. To illumine this point, I would say that this stage is mythically symbolized in Adam and Eve just after the gate of Eden is closed behind them. Interpreting Tillich, I suggest that this primary state could better be designated as original or essential estrangement. Tillich himself contended firmly that he had no intention of “ontologizing sin away”. He therefore opposed to the accusation of having changed all actual estrangement and sin into an “ontological fate” as Niebuhr had contended (8.2.2a). Instead, actual human existence, according to Tillich, is lived under the dynamic polarity of destiny and (finite) freedom (8.2.2.a).

This implies that in a second sense, the notion estrangement refers to what can happen within human lives, namely as actual existential estrangement and sin.384 Original or essential estrangement (first sense) can develop into actual estrangement or distortion of existence (second sense). This second form of estrangement is always a result from both destiny and freedom. It is partly tragic, partly a matter of human responsibility. Estrangement can be enlarged – thus not as a necessity - through force majeure from outside or through intentional mis-achievement by oneself. Clearly, in the second sense of estrangement, existence and estrangement cannot simply be equated. It means, moreover, that evil suffering cannot be said to be (automatically, inevitably) implied in existence - as Tillich did state in the passage under discussion. Existence can develop into moments or periods of more or less estrangement. And these correspond with moments or periods of more or less participation in one’s

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384 See ST II, 32 (38): actual and additional estrangement is possible within the existential situation of finite freedom in the sense that every individual “has the power of contradicting himself and his essential nature”. 

the opposite, e.g., when stating that structures of destruction are “dependent on the universal state of estrangement and its self-destructive consequences” (STII, 74 (183: the German translation does not contain this passage); or: “Man’s estrangement from his essential being is the universal character of existence. (italics, ffo) It is inexhaustibly productive of particular evils in every period” (ST II, 74 (84: Entfremdung vom essentiellen Sein ist der universale Character der menschlichen Existenz. Aus ihr folgen die besonderen Übel jeder Periode). But these severely critical, existentialist expressions appear under the crucial condition: “If in the state of estrangement the dimension of the ultimate is shut off …” (ST II, 73 (83)). And they are followed by the remark: “Structures of destruction are not the only mark of existence. They are counterbalanced by structures of healing and reunion of the estranged”, see ST II, 75 (! 84: this remark, too, is omitted in the German translation).
ground of being, more or less communion with other humans, more or less connection with one’s world. Existence can develop into either more, or less essential being (namely in the second sense as, what I call ‘essential existence’) and correspondingly into less, or more estrangement; more, or less anxious experience of nonbeing as evil, etc. Actually, this is to say that, through growing alienation, human existence can, indeed, develop into endless structures of evil and destruction. But through participation in the ground of all (essential) being, in God, in fellow humans and in one’s surrounding world, one’s life, that is one’s human existence, can also open up and develop towards essential being, rather called New Being. It is to this side, belonging to the element of Human Potential, that I will now turn; that is, after closing the discussion with Niebuhr and others.

In my view, the two terminological ambiguities have needlessly prolonged the controversy that was ignited through some controversial formulations by Tillich, especially his statement that “fully developed creatureliness is fallen creatureliness” and his speaking of a “point at which creation and fall coincide” (8.2.2.a; ST I, 255f (294f)). In the early 1950s these were highly provocative statements that immediately led to hot debates. The criticism was directed against Tillich’s perspective on existence as eo ipso fallen, separated from essential being, estranged from God. Therefore, Tillich was accused of an otherworldly, or world denying attitude, supposedly qualifying human existence as ontologically sinful and evil. However, if seen from a more distant point of view, and arguing on the basis of Tillich’s own ontological distinctions (as between the essential and the existential realm, between potentiality and actuality), and taking into account his own philosophical view on creation as the transition from the one towards the other, the following statements must be made:

1. Tillich’s speaking of the Fall may sound very traditional, but it does not fit in with his own cosmological view. The actualization of a potentiality from the essential realm into something actually existent is more adequately designated as a step forward than as a degeneration or a fall. Tillich’s “point at which creation and fall coincide” is more adequately designated as the point at which creation starts, symbolized by Adam and Eve just outside the closing gate of Eden. What ‘happened’ before this point belongs to the pre-real or pre-existential dimension of the essential realm which is hidden in the creative bosom of the divine.

2. I would say that precisely the ‘moment’ just outside the gate of Eden – which in terms of Tillich’s ontological discourse is the point right after the transition from essence to existence – is most adequately designated as original or ‘still un-developed’ creatureliness. But Tillich predicated this point as “fully developed”. With respect to the example of a new born child, he stated: “God … creates the new born child; but, if created, it falls into the state of existential estrangement” (8.2.2.b; ST II, 44 (52)). This is a hybrid statement and it is questionable if the two parts are commeasurable. The first part makes sense as the (joyful) expression of a believing father or mother right after receiving a new born child. The second part, with no joy and much frowning, is a distanced philosoph-ontological observation. What is more, the statement that a new born child enters into a state of “existential estrangement” is in need of the terminological adjustment and clarification, given above, and which I will stipulate in the next points.

3. Symbolically speaking, the new born child has left its eternal home in God and can be said to have passed a creative process (or blissful moment) of estrangement. In this sense, the start of existence is not really the start of estrangement but the result of estrangement. Estrangement in this ‘first sense’ (as fact) is inherent to the act or process of creation in which the creator and the created become two. However, the start of existence is also the start of possible, further estrangement in the ‘second sense’, namely as actual estrangement taking place within existence. Tillich did not sufficiently distinguish these two stages of estrangement, which made his use of the expression “existential estrangement” highly ambiguous, if not dubious. Due to
this obscurity, Niebuhr and others could take the original estrangement leading towards existence simultaneously as an inevitable fate of actual estrangement within existence. I do not deny that Tillich often gives them the occasion. Still, I contend that it is more in line with Tillich’s ontology and theological anthropology to say the following.

4. A created and new born child, rather than falling down into existence, grows up in a twofold state of being which is ontologically characterized by and embedded in the polarity of limited freedom and destiny. Apart from many circumstances that are interdependent with the place of one’s cradle, the two determining elements of one’s destiny in existential life are one’s being estranged or separated from God on the one hand, and one’s still being familiar or in unity with God on the other.\textsuperscript{385} Taken together, this means that it is part of one’s limited freedom whether one’s existence develops into further “existential estrangement” or into growing ‘essential awareness’, that is, in participation, and unity with regard to God, world, and one’s self. Actually, this corresponds with Tillich’s own acknowledging of the possibility of “essential being” within existence (which, though, he could have designated more lucidly as ‘essential existence’). Realizing such existence which shines with essential being is the aim of all human questing and opening themselves up for New Being. This will be addressed in the following section.

\textbf{8.3 Human potential}

Within Tillichean theology the element of human potential cannot have the highest standing, neither spiritually nor anthropologically. This follows from Tillich’s understanding of the protestant principle (8.1.2.b), his unyielding portrayal of existential estrangement and distortion, and his emphasis on the element of destiny as codetermining factor and complement of human freedom which he has explicitly predicated as \textit{finite}. Applied to the individual, one’s active potential can never be limitless, and the same is valid collectively. History as the collective result of human potential and creativity is not the same as the realization of salvation. The history of humankind, according to Tillich, does not produce saving power. Ultimate power can break into history, and it can work through history, transforming and healing, but “is not created by history”.\textsuperscript{386} History as the joint creation of human inspiration, endeavour, and ingenuity can bring about qualitatively new ‘things’; it is even directed toward the ultimately new, which, however “it can never attain within itself because the ultimate transcends every temporal moment”.\textsuperscript{387}

Now, transcendence of the ultimate may certainly be true in separate moments and even during periods of time, but Tillich likewise maintained that the ultimate, as related to history at large, is not only transcendent but also immanent and present. Thus, he did adopt ‘something unconditional’ \textit{within} everything conditioned (metaphysical \textit{apriori}: 8.1.1.c), of which we are even directly aware, at least of its possibility (mystical \textit{apriori}: 8.1.2.a). He further held that a new quality of being, New Being, is present “within and under the conditions of existence”; in particular, that everything qualitatively or ultimately new that can be discovered by history, is “implicitly present in the New Being in Jesus as the Christ”.\textsuperscript{388}

On the basis of the exposition of Tillichean theology so far, according to the first

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{385} See the opening quote in the Introduction, taken from “Two types of philosophy of religion”, suggesting that meeting God is not meeting a complete stranger but someone or “something that is identical with [one]self although it transcends [one] infinitely”.
\item \textsuperscript{386} ST III, 363 (413).
\item \textsuperscript{387} ST III, 396 (448).
\item \textsuperscript{388} ST II, 119; 119f. (130)
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
main elements cosmology (8.1) and hamartiology (8.2), I will now describe the relevant aspects with regard to the third main element: Human potential (8.3.). Firstly, I will describe what might be the aim of a human potential (8.3.1 The New Being), secondly, I will relate to the main constituting elements within a Tillichean perspective on human potential (8.3.2 human potential as Essentialization and as Participation).

8.3.1 NEW BEING

The evocative concept of the New Being refers to what entered the scene of human existence in the event of Jesus as the Christ. The New Being can be approached ontologically with respect to its localization (a), theologically with respect to its religious substance and content (b), and from a phenomenological point of view as a perennial phenomenon of human aspiration (c).

8.3.1. THE ONTOLOGICAL PLACE AND STATUS OF NEW BEING

In order to localize the New Being within the whole of Tillichean cosmology, I will recall some elements of his ontology scattered about the earlier parts of the paragraph. According to Tillich, what exists has left the realm of pure essence (8.2.1; 8.2.2); and, ‘fallen’ into existence, it finds itself in the position of existential estrangement and distortion (8.2.3.b.i). Therefore, what exists can be regarded as less than what it was in the realm of essence. But from a different point of view, Tillich did also maintain the opposite, saying that what exists “is more than it is in the state of mere potentiality …”.

From here, the question to be asked is: why then speak of a “Fall”? The answer might be that ‘human being’ could be more than it actually is in plain existence, if lived “in the power of its essential nature”. It is within this constellation that Tillich brings forward his concept of the New Being as the great “restorative principle” within his system.

The New Being is new in so far as it is the undistorted manifestation of essential being within and under the conditions of existence. It is new in two respects: it is new in contrast to the merely potential character of essential being; and it is new over against the estranged character of existential being. It is actual, conquering the estrangement of actual existence.

According to Tillich, the four Gospels describe Jesus as the “bearer” of the New Being. He is the Christ or Messiah in so far as in his existence “the conflict between the essential unity of God and man and man’s estrangement is overcome”.

The particulars of this conflict can be and often are described in psychological terms, but...
not so in the Bible. Tillich observes that even when the biblical reports describe the inner life of Jesus, they do not primarily psychologize, they rather ontologize. They show “the presence of the New Being in him under the conditions of existence.”

Thus, when they describe his anxiety for having to die, their point is to show “his total participation in human finitude” as well as “his conquest of anxiety”. Their primary focus is “not some specific psychological behaviour” but to describe examples of “the encounter of the New Being with the forces of estrangement”. One could say that the Gospels do not primarily describe the psychological strength of Jesus, but the ontological power (’eksousia) of the New Being, he represents.

At this point Tillich recalls that the term ‘being’ when used with respect to God must be taken as ‘power of being’. Analogously, regarding Jesus as the Christ, the term New Being refers to the power in him to resist nonbeing, the power to conquer existential estrangement. The use of the word “being” points to something that precedes one’s psychological dynamics. It implies the power that is not a matter of one’s good will. Instead, it is a “gift” preceding and determining every act of the will. What Tillich is actually implying here is “that the concept of the New Being re-establishes the meaning of grace.” Divine grace, therefore, can be explained in ontological terms as the power to transform existence into New Being. This brings us to the theological or religious aspects of New Being.

8.3.1.b The theological substance and religious content of New Being

The picture of the life of Jesus bringing the New Being is not that of an unaffected divine-human robot. Instead, Jesus as the Christ had to cope with “serious temptation, real struggle, or tragic involvement in the ambiguities of life”. Similar to ordinary humans, he is subjected to all the difficulties of existential estrangement. But in his case “estrangement is conquered” in himself, and “permanent unity is kept with God”. He succeeds in transcending all the negativities of existence in himself through the power of this unity. All theological symbols used to interpret the religious meaning of Jesus – like the Christ, Son of Man, Messiah, Son of God, Logos – point to the “undisrupted unity of the centre of his being with God” as the substance or decisive power of the New Being. In the power of this unity, he not only maintains a royal serenity against the attacks and disruptions from estranged existence. The power of New Being is also actual when Jesus takes the existential self-destruction upon himself in “self-surrendering love”, thus actively representing the love of God.

In a sermon called The New Being, Tillich meditated on Galatians 6,15. Neither circumcision nor un-circumcision count for anything, only a new creation. What St.
Paul is saying, according to Tillich, is that belonging to either this or that religion is of no avail, since no religion as such, not even Christianity, does produce the New Being. The only thing that counts is the “union with Him in whom the New Reality is present”. It means on the one hand that “Christianity is more than a religion; it is the message of a New Creation”; on the other hand that Christianity as a religion is of equally little importance as circumcision or its opposite. What Tillich is implying is that as such, there is little advantage in being a baptized Christian, a circumcised Jew, or an unharmed Heathen. The only important thing is that in the midst of the old creation of estranged existence there is this new quality and power of New Being. And for the Christian “this New Creation is manifest in Jesus who is called the Christ”. This means that the element of ultimate concern, the object of our infinite passion is in the end not Jesus but the New Being he mediated. The work of the Saviour is considered of higher importance than his person which is in line with Tillich’s concept of final revelation (see 8.1.2.a.iii; 8.1.2.b.iii).

The religious import of the New Being is largely coinciding with the content of salvation which Tillich explained in three forms of renewal, namely as re-conciliation, re-union, re-surrection. In all cases, the New Being is meant as a gift. Thus, the vital aspect of reconciliation is not a moral demand but the invitation to accept it as the new reality, the New Being. It represents a strong and encouraging appeal: just be reconciled with God, with yourself, with others! You need not first prove anything. If you think that you yourself have to reconcile God, you will fail. The Gospel tells us, says Tillich, that a new reality has appeared in which “you are reconciled”, no preconditions required. We “must only be open to be grasped by it, although we have nothing to show”. We do not need to show anything, nor demand this from others, we only should let it be.

The second mark of the New Being, re-union, is also offered as a reality we are invited to accept. In Jesus as the Christ the New Being was present and manifest “because in Him separation never overcame the unity” with God, world or self. This power of “undisrupted union” is represented by Him, and inspiring mediated to all that become its witness. The healing power of the New Being includes “reunion … with others”. The ultimate significance of the Church as the assembly of God is that in it “the reunion of man to man is pronounced and confessed and realized” even if fragmentarily. In effect, we often betray the reunion that is before us, and relapse into the old being. This asks for another mark of New Being. This mark is resurrection

400 The New Being, 16.
401 The New Being, 18.
402 The New Being, 19; “The New Creation – this is our ultimate concern; this should be our infinite passion – the infinite passion of every human being. This matters, this alone matters ultimately”.
403 In the sermon on “The New Being” Tillich presents this self-relativizing import of Christianity as a point to be proud of: “And now let me boast for a moment about the fact that we are Christians … It is the greatness of Christianity that it can see how small it is. The importance of being a Christian is that we can stand the insight that it is of no importance”, see The New Being, 19.
404 The New Being, 20.
405 The New Being, 21f.
406 The New Being, 22; whenever this New Reality comes to awareness, says Tillich, one feels “united with God, the ground and meaning of one’s existence”. One obtains love of one’s destiny, courage to bear one’s own anxiety, and a deep sense of self-acceptance and reunion with one’s self (22).
407 The New Being, 23.
which, according to Tillich, need not primarily be associated with graves that break open and return dead bodies. Instead,

resurrection means the victory of the New state of things, the New Being born out of the death of the Old. Resurrection is not an event that might happen in some remote future, but it is the power of the New Being to create life out of death, here and now, today and tomorrow. … Resurrection happens now, or it does not happen at all. It happens in us and around us, in soul and history, in nature and universe.408

Clearly, Tillich’s picture of the three marks of New Being, taking place now and here, shows great affinity to the emphasis on living creativity as advocated by Matthew Fox.

I conclude that the New Being is a transformation of actual existence in which separation and estrangement are overcome, leading to a new state of things which is more whole, a more reconciled, holistic reality. This new reality has happened before us. And it may happen in us and through us and around us. What comes first, or what is most basic in its realization is not an active human potential but the power of the New Being itself. You need not fabricate the New Being yourself. But Tillich did urge his audience saying: “Accept it, enter into it, let it grasp you”.409

8.3.1.c New Being as a perennial quest

As the human predicament of estrangement is universal, the quest for New Being appears in all religions and cultures. The quest can be explicitly religious or intention-al secular, it can have a utopian character or take on a more realistic form. Although the form in which the New Being is envisioned changes from religion to religion and from culture to culture, there are two main types of expecting the New Being. These forms correlate with the role that history is allowed to play.410 Tillich distinguished historical and non-historical expectations that largely correspond with, respectively, this-worldly and other-worldly types of belief.

In the non-historical forms, the New Being is sought “above history”. This type, according to Tillich, is present in Eastern religions where New Being is seen as (di-vine) power, not to transform but “to overcome the human predicament”. History is a “circular, self-repeating movement” but has no universal aim, does not create anything really new. Salvation begins in history, since human life takes place within its confines. But it “does not occur through history”. The New Being does not concern the restoration or healing of private misery, nor the transformation of this life collectively. It is not aiming at the participation by groups, families or the whole of human-kind. Instead, its aim is that “individuals … transcend the whole sphere of existence”. As Tillich puts it, this take of New Being includes on the one hand “the negation of all beings”, that is, of existence as such. On the other hand, it implies the “affirmation of the Ground of Being alone”. To a greater or smaller extent, this implies the ontological “negation of everything that has being”.411 Clearly, this perspective on historical reality bears great resemblance to the equally a-cosmic ACIM perspective on outer reality

408 The New Being, 24.
409 Ibid.
410 ST II, 86f (96).
411 ST II, 87 (97).
as entirely illusory (see § 4).

Nevertheless, in Western culture and religion, the perspective on the New Being most often has *historical* character. The aim of the New Being is not to escape from history; nor is it to be sought “above history”. Rather, the New Being is pursued as “aim of history”. Extension of New Being implies that estranged, existential reality is transformed “in and through a historical process which is unique, unrepeatable, irreversible”. New Being is expected in a “horizontal direction”, says Tillich, not vertically from above. Thus, the historical type, generally, goes along with an affirmative, this-worldly view on reality, the whole of which is considered to be “essentially good”. This goodness may be distorted but is never fully annulled. Estrangement does not create ontological strangers.

Christianity as Tillich prefers to see it, is primarily engaged in the historical type of New Being. This is illustrated with the symbol “Messiah” which the Old Testament adopted from the Semitic and Egyptian world. The pre-Judaic origin of the symbol is taken by Tillich as a hint of its universality. But especially its content underlines the primarily historical character of the Christian quest for a new reality. In ancient Egypt, it was the meaning and mission of the king as the “anointed one” to conquer the enemies and establish peace and justice. This points clearly to a political, and thus to a primarily historical character of the pursued new reality. In this line, the Messiah does not safe individuals from historical existence, instead “he is to transform historical existence” itself.

Still, Christianity does include the trans-historical type as well. As Tillich observed, the messianic character became amalgamated with other symbolic figures, like the “Servant of JHWH”, the “Man from Above”, or the “Son of Man”, in varying extents combining “transcendent roots with historical functions”. Apart from such vertical lines in apocalyptic literature and in the Johannian Logos doctrine, Tillich pointed especially to St. Paul’s Christ-mysticism and his doctrine of the Spirit as the entrance through which “the non-historical type could enter Christianity”. This type became strongest in Gnosticism, against which the Church decided to save the historical character of Christianity. Tillich himself was convinced that Christianity, in order to be universally valid, should combine the historical and the non-historical type of questing for the New Being. He actually linked an otherworldly with a this-worldly perspective, which confirms my analogous view that his theology is largely a *compositio oppositorum*, namely of this-worldly and other-worldly beliefs, of experience-informed and revelation-oriented perspectives, or, framed in still another polarity, as a combination of historical and existential awareness of being.

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412 Ibid.; examples of the historical type are found in ancient Persia, Judaism, Christianity, Islam as well as some strains of modern humanism.
413 ST II, 88.
414 ST II, 87.
415 ST II, 88.
416 ST II, 89.
417 ST II, 89f.
418 The distinction ‘historical’ versus ‘existential’ experience of reality/being is meant to represent the thesis made by Aad Woudenberg, *Kairos en het eeuwige nu*. According to Woudenberg, Tillich’s theology contains a problematic combination of two types of theological thinking, one historical, the other idealistic-ontological. The historical type of thinking is exemplified with two early articles by Tillich: “Kairos I” (1922) and “Kairos II” (1926) describing God/religion as becoming concrete in actual his
8.3.2 HUMAN POTENTIAL AS ESSENTIALIZATION AND AS PARTICIPATION

In the introduction to the present paragraph (8.3), I observed that for Tillich the element ‘human potential’ can hardly have the highest standing. This statement needs clarification, partly because the notion as such is not even used by Tillich, more importantly because the general drift of Tillichean theology and anthropology is obviously not one of thinking low of human spirit and its possibilities. Therefore, it is necessary, firstly, to define some distinctions within the broad meaning of Human potential used so far. Only on that basis it is possible to see clearly in what sense the subject matter of Human potential is acknowledged in Tillichean theology; and in what sense it is denied or relativized.

Actually, it was studying Tillich’s concept of the New Being that made me aware of two ways in which Human potential can be interpreted. Firstly, I will give an etic description of these two meanings (a. Human potential in an active and passive sense). On that basis it is possible to describe to what extent the subject matter of both sides of human potential is denied, relativized, or emphasized in Tillichean theology. Thus, I will dwell on Tillich’s concept of essentialization which, largely, refers to a passive capacity (b. The passive potential of essentialisation). But his theology does also acknowledge, and even emphasize human potential in a (semi-)active sense, especially in one of the major and most frequently used notions in his theology, namely ‘participation’ (c. The active human potential of participation).

8.3.2.a HUMAN POTENTIAL IN AN ACTIVE AND PASSIVE SENSE

In this subsection (a), I will distinguish three possible meanings of ‘potential’ as related to Tillichean theology; and describe briefly the kind of potential Tillich did not allow to humans. In the second and third subsections I will discuss what Tillich did see as truly part of our human potential (8.3.2.b and c).

The notion ‘potential’ can be taken in an active or a passive sense. On the active end, one can think e.g., of the autonomous and skilful craftsmanship of a carpenter who has the active potential and capacity to manufacture a classic dresser. In the history of theology, this form of potential was radicalized as omnipotencia, attributed to God alone. Almightyness was materialized especially in the concept creatio ex nihilo suggesting that in order to create, God had no need of primordial matter or a second principle whatsoever. With respect to a human creator like our carpenter it is obvious that, before starting to carve, he must have already existing timber at his disposal. Moreover, this timber should be fit for the carpenter’s purpose. He has to consider the material and its potential which is a more passive, dependent potential, concerning the immanent characteristics of the material, its possibilities of development, not autonomously but under the influence of an external agency.

This distinction of potential as more active within the artist and more passive in

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tory as, for example, in Religious Socialism and/or through prophetic criticism, priestly compassion (Woudenberg, o.c., 39ff). The ontological type of thinking is framed after the title of a particular sermon and a collection of sermons by Tillich: The Eternal Now (Das Ewige im jetzt). According to Woudenberg, Tillich did not succeed in combining the historic and the ontic (or non-historic) line of thinking into a ‘homogeneous’ (o.c., 244) composition. Thus, he sees in the final form of Tillichean theology “een onopgeloste spanning ... tussen het kairotische denken en het ‘eeuwige nu’. Er is sprake van twee concepten van ongelijksoortige herkomst. Het kairosconcept heeft zich gehecht aan de dynamiek van de geschiedenis. In het ‘eeuwige nu’ manifesteert zich een existentialistisch zijnsdenken. Dit heeft zich gehecht aan de eschatologie”, Woudenberg, o.c., 202.

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the material, is also present in the human being itself. The active-passive distinction correlates with the ontological polarity of freedom versus destiny, since the freedom of the craftsman is limited and partly determined by the passive potential of the material that he intends to use (hence the correlation with destiny). And, of course, a human being is not only creator but also object of creation, of transformation under the influence of others. I conclude that we can actually distinguish three forms of potential, namely omnipotencia (Creator-god), semi-potentia (human creator), and passive potential (materials, human beings). My introductory remark, earlier, that ‘human potential’ does not have the highest standing in Tillich’s theology is, of course, entirely valid with respect to the first form. As humans we do not have an absolute potential which, though, is also problematic if accredited to God. As humans we have a semi-potential which is active in one respect and passive in the other.

8.3.2.b THE PASSIVE POTENTIAL OF ESSENTIALIZATION

Taken in the more passive sense, Tillich had a high regard of the Human potential, namely as our capacity to receive the gift of New Being. Human beings have the structure and capacity to be changed and transformed through its power. In fact, Tillich’s picture of the New Being (8.3.1), is at once an evocative picture and a powerful appeal to the very passive potential of humans. This potential is our structural, immanent capacity for renewal, which can become activated and actually working through the external power of the New Being. The predicate ‘passive’ needs nuancing (below: c); and so do the characteristics immanent and external, to which I will now turn.

If we suppose that we have an immanent potential for New Being that must become actual through the external power of the New Being in Christ, the words ‘immanent’ and ‘external’ to describe human potential become blurred, since the external power of New Being is in some sense also within us. It is immanent as the capacity that is built into the ontological structure of our human being, in some sense similar to the way the Aristotelian soul belongs to one’s bodily existence as its inner form. As such, the soul “includes all elements which constitute” one’s outer life process. Now this is said by Tillich where he discusses the systematic theological locus called eschatology. To designate eschatological fulfilment, Tillich makes use of the term essentialization derived from Schelling. The soul, or rather the so called “immortality of the soul” is explained by Tillich as symbolizing the “power of essentialization”. Like most eschatological symbolism, essentialization refers to the relation of the temporal to the eternal. More specifically, as ontological term of ultimate fulfilment, it symbolizes the “transition” from the temporal to the eternal, and this is a metaphor similar to that of the transition from the eternal to the temporal in the doctrine of creation, from essence to existence in the doctrine of the fall, and from existence to essence in the doctrine of salvation.

419 I recall that according to Tillich the inseparable polarity of freedom and destiny is valid even in the ground of being; it is a mystery even in God, see 8.2.2.a.
420 See ST III, 410 (464). Tillich adds that the soul includes these constituting elements “as essences”.
421 ST III, 394-423 (446-477) under the title: “The Kingdom of God as the End of History” (394).
422 ST III, 400 (453: Essentifikation).
423 ST III, 410 (464)
424 ST III, 395 (447).
If interpreted in a Platonic sense, essentialization would imply the return of a thing to the “state of mere essentiality or potentiality, including the removal of everything that is real under the conditions of existence”. But Tillich takes the term in a more inclusive sense to mean

that the new which has been actualized in time and space adds something to essential being, uniting it with the positive which is created within existence, thus producing the ultimately new, the “New Being”, not fragmentarily as in temporal life, but wholly as a contribution to the Kingdom of God in its fulfilment.

The essential realm is enriched by “the positive content of history” while the negative is excluded from participation. It appears from this that temporal existence, after all, is not exclusively a matter of fall, distortion, and destructive estrangement. Existential existence adds something positive, which means that essentialization is at stake whenever New Being occurs in the midst of existence. Clearly, this requires the presupposition that humans have an at least passive potential to adopt and incorporate New Being.

Tillich’s understanding of the “immortality of the soul” gives a clear symbolic picture of this potential. The predication “symbolic” is crucial. According to Tillich it was a confusing error when both Catholic and Protestant theology took the Platonic doctrine of “immortality of the soul” not as a symbol but as a concept. Thus, they treated it as “a naturally immortal substance”. As such it was meant to support an equally literal understanding of eternal life but it became an easy prey to empiricists and Kant. Immortality, however, should be interpreted as a symbol. As such, immortality is normally attributed to the gods or to God, expressing on our side “the experience of ultimacy in being and meaning”. Humans themselves, however, know they are mortal and finite. But, says Tillich, finitude is transcended precisely in this awareness. The more we become aware of our separation from infinity, the stronger we aspire for it. This implies, religiously speaking, that the wider we feel separated from the adored symbols, namely from the immortal gods representing infinity, the more ardent we long to receive ‘infinity’ from them. Now this asks for and is fairly well captured with the notion of a ‘passive potential’. In the Christian context, it presupposes the capacity to obtain eternity from him who can “clothe our mortality with immortality” (I Cor. 15,33).

I conclude that the immortality of the soul, according to Tillich, should not be taken as the concept of a perpetuum vivens but as symbol of the human potential to receive New Being. Humans have the passive power of essentialization, of being fulfilled. Their created goodness implies that they can be transformed into New Being and through its power. Still, the predication “passive” is not meant to delimit the hu-

425 ST III, 400; Tillich observes that, taken in the sense of Plato, essentialization would better fit oriental religions.
426 ST III, 400f (453); also 395 (447: “Man könnte von einer "Anreicherung" des göttlichen Lebens durch die geschichtlichen Prozesse sprechen”).
427 ST III, 397 (449f).
428 ST III, 411 (464, 465)
429 ST III, 411; the passive potential or capacity also appears as a similarly oriented strong desire, see Eternal Now, 80.
man potential to that of a vegetative kernel or germ. Therefore, I now turn to the active side of the human potential.

8.3.2.c Human potential as participation

The characterization of our structural potential as ‘passive’ does not imply a low opinion about it. In his theological anthropology Tillich actually gives great credits both to history and in particular to the human self as the most developed and creative construct of being. Humans include in themselves the “maximum number of potentialities in one living actuality”. But the secret or essence of the human potential, as it appears in the Tillichean perspective, lies primarily in the unity of these potentialities (i Unity of life); and with an eye on this unity, in their actual and mutual participation (ii) which is the active side of human potential.

8.3.2.c.1 Unity of life

The basic perspective in Tillich’s ontological concept of life, as consisting in essential and existential, or in potential and actual being, is that he envisions reality as “the multidimensional unity of life”. Real life or existential reality, as it happens in many dimensions and realms of being, can only be understood, says Tillich, if the “unity and relation of the dimensions and realms of life are understood”. To support and understand this holistic perspective, he rejected the metaphor “level”. Although it emphasizes the equality of the objects belonging to a particular level, it disregards the “organic movement from one to the other”. Picturing reality in ‘levels’ mostly goes along with a hierarchical perspective according to which interaction between the levels takes place either “by control or by revolt”, as e.g. with Thomas Aquinas. Hierarchy is also suggested, according to Tillich, when the metaphor of different ‘levels’ is used with respect to the organic as related to the spiritual. Thus, when body and mind are pictured as two levels of human being, their relation is seen in such a way that either the mental level is reduced to or made fully dependent on the organic, as for example in biologism and psychologism. Or, reversely, mental activities are said to interfere in biological and psychological processes. The latter, of course, is strongly repudiated by biologists and psychologists, denying the idea of a “soul as a separate substance exercising a particular causality”. I note that a very high estimation of mental activities as determining or even ‘evoking’ physical or actual reality is a central belief within New Age religion, described above as the ‘priority of mind over matter’ (3.1.a; 4.1.a) and as ‘creating your own reality’. But for Tillich, envisioning life in lower and higher levels spoils the unity of life.

In order to evade this, and to combine and integrate both diversity and unity, Tillich opted for the metaphor “dimension” and correlative concepts as “realm” and “grade”. His point is that in these symbols “the unity of life is seen above its con-

430 ST III, 17 (27).
431 ST III, 11f.
432 ST III, 12 (22).
433 ST III, 13; Although in Aquinas’ two levelled picture of reality, as nature and as grace, interference is acknowledged (gratia non tollit sed perficit naturam), his perspective remains tied to the dominance of hierarchical thinking, implying a one-way or top-down inference. By contrast, Tillich mentions Nicholas Cusanus (coincidentia oppositorum) and Luther (justificatio peccatoris) as examples of moving beyond the hierarchical principle.
434 ST III, 14.
The fact that life harbours many conflicts is not denied, but these conflicts proceed from the ambiguities of life, from the conditions of existence as finitude and estrangement. According to Tillich, they do not arise from a hierarchy of levels or from rivalling dimensions. Literally, in the spatial sphere (depth, breadth, etc) but also when used metaphorically to denote areas of reality (as the inorganic, organic, psychological, spiritual, historical), the different dimensions do not conflict. Rather, they presuppose one another. Without the inorganic there is no organic, and without both these dimensions, the appearance of a being with language could never have occurred. Together they support the doctrine of the multidimensional unity of life. Tillich did accept a gradation of value among the different dimensions, but without disrupting the unity. For such value judgements Tillich stipulated an ontological criterion measuring the “power of a being to include a maximum number of potentialities in one living actuality”. Historical “man” adds the historical dimension to the other dimensions and has a higher degree of power of being than, say, samplings from the vegetative sphere. But power of being should not be confused with “perfection”. A plant can be much more perfect than a human being, but the latter has more power of being, that is, greater integrating potential.

### 8.3.2.c.ii Potential through participation

Apparently, the power and range of human potential is proportional to the variety and sum of dimensions in which a being is actually living and taking part. I assume that this is the underlying reason that Tillich paid attention primarily to the worth of human participation in the diversity of life, rather than emphasizing the greatness of our active and creative potential as such. An example of this can be found in the fifth part of *Systematic Theology*, which is entitled “History and the Kingdom of God”. There he develops a view on the “drive toward universal integration” in both respects, historically and theologically. The dynamics of history are said to be “universalist by nature”, while God’s Kingdom, his providential work, is accredited with the “drive toward universal centeredness”. The aim is not individually reaching a supposedly highest level of potential, but participating in as many realms as possible of the multidimensional unity of life.

Thus, dealing with the creative and active side of human potentiality leads to notions like taking part, integration, return from separation, reunion after estrangement. Tillich’s focus on the importance of participation reveals itself also in side remarks, as in his discussion of Plato’s erroneous idea of the immortal soul that was referred to above. Plato did admit, says Tillich, that his arguments for the soul’s immortality can be “grasped only by those who participate (italics flo) in the good and the beautiful

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435 ST III, 15 (26).
436 ST III, 15 (25f); the dimensions depth, breadth, and height “cross without disturbing each other; there is no conflict between dimensions”.
437 ST III, 16.
439 ST III, 341 (390); the universalist tendency is, of course, not without isolationist attempts but these are not original actions but re-actions, a “withdrawal (Rückzug) from involvement in universalist movements”.
440 ST III, 340 (388).
and the true”. Similarly, Tillich observed that for Aristotle the “symbol of highest fulfilment … is man’s participation (italics ffo) in the eternal self-intuition of the divine nous”, which he then further considered to be close to Plotinus’ experience of “mystical union of the one with the One”. Clearly, Tillich’s affinity with these classic philosophical, largely esoteric views and their implicit or explicit ‘holism based on participation’ is stronger than with the course taken by traditional Christian theology. The latter, according to Tillich, followed its prior adoption of the individual person based on “biblical personalism” and focused on the individual’s eternal destiny. For that purpose, Christianity stuck to the Platonic ‘concept’ of the immortal soul.

Orthodox Lutheranism proceeded along these lines with its doctrine of two separate realms. It is criticized by Tillich for separating the spiritual from the worldly Kingdom, without any real interpenetration or mutual participation. In the Lutheran perspective, humans must be saved from their worldly bondage to sin and guilt in order to take part in the heavenly realm after death. This heavenly participation, however, as well as its object, the justice of Gods Kingdom, have no relation to the justice of earthly power structures since they are “two worlds … separated by an unbridgeable gap”. Such perspective, however, as well as the ‘concept’ immortal soul that goes along with it, must be “radically rejected” according to Tillich, since participation in eternity is not “life hereafter”. Neither is it a natural quality of the human soul. It is rather the creative act of God, who lets the temporal separate itself from and return to the eternal…. “[I]mmortality” does not mean a continuation of temporal life after death, but it means a quality which transcends temporality.

In this quotation, the passive and the active potential neatly come together. Immortality is the passive potential of essentialization (8.3.2.b). It is the quality that transcends temporality, or estranged existence, in the sense that the temporal can reunite with the eternal. In case this happens, it actually takes place through participation of the temporal in eternity.

Participation is the active side of our potential, that is to say ‘active’ in a very nuanced way, because even participation, says Tillich, in not a natural quality of the human soul, it is not a matter of pure human autonomy or freedom. It is as much a matter of our destiny which is made up by separation in time, and then by the possibility of returning to the eternal. Thus, even our taking part in eternity is a gift, a given

441 *ST* III, 411.
442 See also *Courage to Be* (*CtB*), 22 for a similar affinity with Spinoza: Courage to be, or as Tillich puts it: “[s]elf-affirmation according to Spinoza is participation in the divine self-affirmation”. In Tillich’s own words, it is “participation of the soul in the divine power” (23); see also note 321 with reference to Spinoza (8.2.4.a).
443 *ST* III, 407, 411 (460f, 465)
444 See *ST* III, 355 (405f); the Lutheran perspective of two separate Realms or Kingdoms is discussed by Tillich as example of the “transcendental type” of historical interpretation of history. Admitting that the transcendental perspective on history is “implicit in the eschatological mood of the New Testament”, Tillich observed that it was radicalized in orthodox Lutheranism (355). The other types of history are infinite “progressivism” exemplified with Hegel (353 (403)) and “utopianism” which is “progressivism with a definite aim” (354 (404)).
445 *ST* III, 355; its most obvious shortcoming being the contrast between “the salvation of the individual” and the transformation of the historical group and the universe”.
446 *ST* III, 410 (463).
possibility, on this side of death. We live in the Old Creation and the one Christian
demand to take seriously is “that we also participate in the New Creation”.447

8.4. Inventory of findings

As a deliberate theologian of mediation, Tillich tends to combine opposing view-
points which accounts for the many plus-minus insertions in the inventory table. Even in case I have decided on a yes (+) one might argue that it should be a plus-minus as well. But the table does not contain a pure minus (-). Apparently, a genuinely apolo-
getic theologian never says No. I give the results and motivate my choices briefly.

8.4.1 Four questions
(1) Divine-human unity: ±

To the ontological question of divine-human unity, I have entered a plus-minus in
the inventory table. This is in line with the centrality in Tillich’s works of the concept
of estrangement. God and the human being, the human and the divine are separated
and estranged from one another, namely under the conditions of existence but they are
no ontological strangers.

(2) Denial original sin: ±

Regarding original sin and the human predicament of non posse, Tillich tried to
give a nuanced answer. Clearly, he did not agree with the partly biblical idea of original
sin as initiated by Adam and Eve, drawing us all in a predicament of hopeless non
posse. Still, he made a fundamental point of creation as the transition from essence
to existence, symbolizing it with “the Fall” into existence while strongly emphasizing
its inevitably accompanying estrangement. Especially his seeming identification
of creation and fall (“developed creatureliness is fallen creatureliness” (8.2.2.a) was
criticized for making sin ontologically inevitable. Moreover, his perspective seemed
to identify existence as necessarily evil (for this debate, see small print sections: in
8.2.2.a; 8.2.2.b; 8.2.4.d.iii). Tillich, however, maintained that human life is neither
a place of inescapable fate, nor one of unlimited human freedom. As humans we do
not live in total slavery or non posse, instead our predicament is one of “finite
freedom”. At this point, his second pair of ontological elements is relevant: the polarity
of freedom and destiny. Since human freedom is always balanced by destiny, it is not
unlimited or boundless but finite freedom.

(3) Denial of evil: ±

Significant with respect to the denial evil is Tillich’s adoption of relative nonbe-
ing (mè on) while rejecting absolute nonbeing (ouk on). The former is explained as
enclosed by being, and dependent on being. But as such, relative nonbeing is also
deemed indispensable for being, namely as a catalytic agent to bring being into the
open and force it “to affirm itself dynamically” (8.2.4.a). As such, relative nonbeing is
not evil, but belongs as potentiality to the realm of essence. Theologically, this implies
that it is embraced and overcome by God: namely “in the process of the divine life”.
The idea of absolute nonbeing, on the other hand, implying a “negative principle” in
addition to God, is denied by Tillich. It may look theologically correct to call nonbe-

447 New Being, 15.
ing ‘absolute’, and then keep it cleanly separated from God but this is discarded by Tillich as the attempt to avoid the “mystery of being”. This mystery implies that there is “dialectical negativity in God himself”. Thus, relative nonbeing is affirmed by Tillich, absolute nonbeing is denied, how about evil?

Evil, according to Tillich, is no ontological reality of itself but occurs in the slipstream of anxiety. When a normal or natural anxiety (facing a regular form of relative nonbeing) develops into an experience of evil, this is due to estrangement and sin (8.2.4.d.i). In this way, Tillich takes evil in the “narrow sense” as eo ipso religious. With this, he (Tillich) means that estrangement and sin are not just one form of evil next to moral and natural variants. Instead they evoke and produce both the experience and the development of all forms of evil. Thus, evil is ontologically denied (it is no reality in se); simultaneously evil is theo-anthropologically defined.

(4) Denial actual sin: ±

To the extent that actual sin requires unreserved freedom in order to be a “culpable, personal act”, sin is denied, or at least strongly relativized by Tillich, since freedom is always counterbalanced by destiny. For himself he prefers the term estrangement although he admits that the traditional term ‘sin’ cannot entirely be abandoned. Both terms are needed in order to represent the two ontological poles of freedom and destiny. The element of freedom implies the aspect of personal responsibility which is predominant in the traditional doctrine of sin. For Tillich, however, any personal, responsible, free act is rooted in the universal destiny of estrangement (8.2.3.b.i). The ‘plus-minus’ in the inventory is intended to say that while sin is not denied, estrangement is affirmed.

8.4.2 Four anti-apologetic benchmarks
(a) Co-eternity +

Given the central symbol of transition from essence to existence, Tillich’s cosmological perspective can fairly well be considered as a form of emanation. He discarded a second principle of non-being (ouk on) standing independently or absolute from God. Simultaneously, he adopted relative non-being (me on) which he took in close connection to being (8.2.4.a). Non-being is embraced by being, like actual existence is included as potentiality in the realm of essence. Nonbeing and even the demonic is said by Tillich to be enclosed by the divine (8.2.4.b). Tillichean cosmology can fairly well be captured as ‘co-eternity of the world in God’. Therefore, I have entered a ‘plus’ concerning co-eternity.

(b) Direct gnosis ±

The question of religion and knowledge of God is approached by Tillich both ontologically and historically. In the first sense, he adopts the ontological awareness of something unconditional which is direct (mystical apriori 8.1.2.a) and universally human (8.1.2.a.ii). This is what he called “ultimate concern” with the emphasis on its character of ultimacy, and on the irresistible seriousness and passion of the concern. With regard to the benchmark ‘direct gnosis’, it is clear that ultimate concern is certainly ‘direct’ (+), although it is not yet a gnosis with a definite content (-). There is the ‘direct’ metaphysical-experiential aspect of religious awareness or concern (which might be designated as fides qua). But this must be distinguished from the material or
content side of this awareness (fides quae) which is not direct. The content of one’s “ultimate concern” is always mediated. It must be given and found in interaction with one’s historical reality. Therefore, the content of ultimate concern can vary from person to person ((8.1.2.a.iii). Both the direct and the indirect or mediated aspect of religious knowledge, that is, of ultimate concern follow from Tillich’s cosmology, envisioning the Creator and the created, the Infinite and the finite as essentially one, while existentially, that is, in actual reality, as separated or estranged. Essentially there is human-divine unity which accounts for direct awareness, while the separation implicit in historical existence implies the need of bridging estrangement and thus of mediation. Therefore, Tillich could even emphasize the indispensability of revelation. I conclude that both aspects of the religious liaison are combined in Tillich’s cosmological principle, stating that “the Unconditioned of which we have an immediate awareness, without inference, can be recognized in the cultural and natural universe” (8.1.2.a.i). Ultimate concern is a combination of direct (ontological) awareness and mediated (cosmological) content.

(c). Denial of individual soul ±

It would make little sense to suggest that Tillich denied the individual soul or gave little importance to the human individuality. Still, it is equally clear that his perspective on the religious connection need not necessarily be taken in terms of a personal relationship. Only religious believers who address the unconditional element of their ultimate concern as a highest Person, as God, develop their religious stance into a person-to-person spirituality. The personal quality on the divine side of this relation will be discussed below (d). With respect to the human side, Tillich was cautious not to overemphasize the personal element. In this respect, he had longstanding reservations concerning Protestant preaching with “its tendency to overburden the personal centre and to make the relation to God dependent on continuous, conscious decisions and experiences” – all happening at the expense of the role of sacraments and symbols. For Tillich, the emphasis in Protestant sermons on the deciding personality was, of course, difficult to combine with the Protestant principle (8.1.2.b).

The key to question the overstressing of the responsible individual self, Tillich found in the rediscovery of the unconscious in medical psychology and in unconscious drives both in individuals and in the mass psyche. Growing awareness of supra-personal forces was provided at many levels: deterministic tendencies in nature (in physics and biology); compulsory forces in the unconscious human self (psychology); exclusive social structures through class domination, cultural limitation through failing education (social sciences). Without denying human freedom and personal responsibility, these insights promoted in the 1950s and further a growing curiosity towards and understanding of the element of destiny, of structures, and ‘orderliness’

448 Protestant Era, xxxix: the “exclusive emphasis on the centre of personality in Protestantism” corresponds to the “loss of sacraments and symbols” in the Protestant liturgy. According to Tillich, especially the sacramental element represents the “presence of the divine before our acting and striving, in a structure of grace” (Prot.Era, xxxviiiif). Clearly, in relation to such sacramental-symbolic ‘presence’ of the divine one is not primarily supposed to maintain one’s individual self but rather to give and surrender oneself to this ‘presence’. For a discussion of Tillich’s concept of sacrament, see: Brinkman, Schepping en Sacrament, 69ff.

449 Protestant Era, xxxix.

450 ST II, 56f.
in every human life\textsuperscript{451}. The dispute between Niebuhr and Rogers (see 8.2.2.b) can be seen in this light. In this debate, Tillich stood closer to the position of humanistic psychology. Whereas Niebuhr emphasized the “unique capacity for freedom of the human person”, Tillich had at least equal eye for the element of destiny as the counterpart of human freedom. And while Niebuhr focused on “the indeterminate character of the self’s capacity for transcending itself, its history and its world”\textsuperscript{452}, for Tillich the most analytic characteristic of all human existence was estrangement. Compared to the traditional doctrine of sin, like Plantinga’s (culpable and personal), Tillich paid more attention to the pole of destiny. His theology does more to describe the process of estrangement than the conscious act of the deliberate and free deciding individual person. The latter is certainly not denied, but, compared to traditional theological anthropology, clearly relativized … and, in light of his almost ontological take of the Protestant principle, graciously overruled.\textsuperscript{453} The theological import of justification has “consequences beyond the personal” (see 8.1.2.b; note 186).

\textit{(d) Denial of a transmundane personal God.} ±

To define Tillich’s attitude regarding the affirmation or denial of a personal trans-mundane God, it is vital to keep in mind the theological core of his concept and use of symbolism (8.1.1.e). It’s all-determining crux is that, as believers, theologians, philosophers of religion, and even as God denying atheists, we do not only talk about God in symbols (which are mostly secondary or sustaining symbols). But crucial to understanding Tillichean theology is to see that as the notion of a highest person \textit{God is himself (itself) a symbol}. The symbol God, the God-symbol, is the principal, religious representation of ultimate, unconditional reality. This enables Tillich on the one hand to deny that God exists. According to him there is no objectified God-individual, neither immanently, nor trans-mundanely. On the other hand, he can freely and realistically speak about God in consciously chosen, regularly Christian symbolic language, in order to address and interact with what concerns him ultimately.

\textsuperscript{451} ST II, 56f.
\textsuperscript{452} Niebuhr, \textit{The Self and the Dramas of History}, 4, 5; see: 8.2.2.b.
\textsuperscript{453} See his famous sermon “You are Accepted”, in: \textit{The Shaking of Foundations}, 155-165.
§ 9. Taking Stock (2) - Some main concepts of personhood

In the main Introduction, I supposed a critical stance, either implicitly or explicitly, from the New Age perspective towards traditional Christian views. The assumed criticism concerns hamartiological issues, firstly, the emphasis on divine-human separation or antithesis; secondly, the neglect or even denial on the Christian side of human potential. As one glance at the Inventory Table can tell, the criticism seems largely valid as related to the perspectives of Barth (as present in his doctrine of sanctification in CD IV/2), but less valid regarding Tillich. Core elements in Barthian theology are, indeed, a firm emphasis on divine-human opposition, and a profoundly critical relativization of the human role and potential to actually live close to God and according to one’s intended humanity. With Tillich too, actual existence entails divine-human separation which he described as estrangement. Estrangement, however, implies that the divine and human beings must explicitly not be seen as ontological strangers. The resulting impression is that estrangement does point to a divine-human distinction but without denying the potential of humans to engage in New Being and to renew their life of human-divine partnership.

Inventory Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Roberts/Seth</th>
<th>ACiM</th>
<th>Fox</th>
<th>Barth</th>
<th>Tillich</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1)  Divine-human unity</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>±</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2)  Denial orig. sin</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>±</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3)  Denial of evil (other than sin)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>±</td>
<td>±</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4)  Denial actual sin</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>±</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a)  Co-eternity</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b)  Direct gnosis</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>±</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>±</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c)  Denial of individual soul</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>±</td>
<td>±</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d)  Denial of a personal, trans-mundane God</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>±</td>
<td>±</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>±</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Still, the general picture cannot obscure that opposing perspectives sometimes end up remarkably close; that particular viewpoints and elements in the sources of both sides are less distinct, and more nuanced than the common answer may suggest. This is also mirrored by the results in the Inventory Table, especially the many plus-minuses showing internal nuances as well as tensions or even inconsistencies within the sources. Simple clear-cut answers, like yes or no, will seldom do. Moreover, a third main theme or element of attention appeared as relevant in connection with evil and sin, namely the question, or rather the acknowledgement of individual personhood (6.3.2.d).

In this intermediate paragraph, I will first look back and consider the supposed criticism in relation to our findings with Barth and Tillich (9.1 Is the twofold criticism correct?). My intention, however, is not to give a definite or final answer to this question. Instead, I will ponder and suggest what may be the basic and primary motif behind the two theologies and their authors; and describe how this motif can be recognized in their views on the two themes of divine-human relationship and human potential.
In the second and third part of this paragraph, I will explore what can be implied in the concept of person (9.2. Some main concepts of personhood) and (9.3 The concept of person and S/spirit by Max Scheler). Seeing the centrality and importance of the notion “personal” in the traditional concept of sin, clarity vis-à-vis the notion and its derivatives is required, also because part of the sources either blurred the reality of objectifiable, individual personhood, or denied it altogether. Clarity about the main aspects of being a human person is also preconditional in order to come to a new formulation of the doctrine of sin which is the aim of this study (Part Four).

9.1 Is the twofold criticism correct?
Finding the basic motif in Barth and Tillich, in their theologies, is not a question of psychology. Instead, it requires to ask for the main and lasting themes in their work for which I will refer to some of the findings in the previous paragraphs. The basic motifs or themes in Barth and Tillich are the emphasis respectively on antithesis (9.1.a) and mediation (9.1.b).

9.1.a Antithesis as runway for participation (Barth)
At the basis of Barth’s theological cosmology lies his doctrine of eternal election, which is more or less his version of the anti-apologetic bedrock creatio ex nihilo in combination with his rather unique interpretation of predestination. Eternal election, according to Barth, is God’s primordial and positive choice for “a being distinct from Himself … as His creature”. This creature is not only His “antithesis” (Gegenüber) but is elected simultaneously for “participation in His own glory” (7.1.a). To the obvious question whether this being has ever existed, Barth’s answer was that he has lived among us as the essence and meaning of human being: Jesus Christ.

If we keep this in mind, then it appears that opposition or antithesis is for Barth the precondition for participation. The positive cause of electing (and creating) a being distinct from Himself is that “God determined and determines never to be God apart from the human race”¹. Now, to the extent that this is supposed to be an ‘indelible determination’ with ontological standing², there is a remarkable closeness to the monistic ontology of A Course in Miracles. The similarity concerns especially the latter’s thesis of the changelessness of reality (4.1.d) and the statement that “separation never occurred” (4.2.d). The difference is that in ACIM, the divine-human participation (as symbolized in the Sonship) is presented as an ontological matter of fact, whereas according to Barth divine-human participation is not only originally, but will always be again, a matter of divine choice and initiative. I will illustrate Barth’s emphasis on divine initiative with his discussion of Creation from nothing (i) and with the so-called Barthian actualism (ii).

(i) Creation from Nothing
Barth strongly supported creation from nothing.³ The many exactitudes and im-

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¹ McCormack, Br., “Grace and being”, in: Cambridge Companion, 100.
² Krötke, “Karl Barth’s anthropology”, in: Cambridge Companion, 164; according to Krötke, Barth’s anthropology deals with “God’s elected, ontologically good creature” (165) that has no ability of becoming “absolutely and ontologically godless” (166, with reference to CD IV/1, 480f). Clearly, this observation is a typical example of what I have designated as Barthian realism (7.1.b).
³ CD III/2, 155 (185): Far from being “idle speculation”, Barth speaks of “the inner necessity of thinking and teaching as the Church has done” as, according to him, the formula expresses “the absolutely
lications he derived from its repository (see 7.1.d), show his cautiousness against basing the intended “participation in His glory” upon anything but God. On the one hand, the formula serves to affirm that, in themselves, humans are by no means divine or even close to God, which is largely in opposition to emanative monism. Thus, *ex nihilo* is taken to imply that humans are *strictly distinct from* God, as well as that they have *no being in common* with God, which is clearly contrarious to all three New Age sources.

On the other hand, cosmological dualism is countered no less than monism, according to Barth, when stating that a human being has *no being apart from God* either; that all created beings wholly and solely stem from God. ‘From nothing’ is then taken to imply that all creatures are supposed to *exclusively derive from God* which seems to be a leaning back towards emanative imagery. The more the absolute qualification ‘from nothing’ is supplemented with or positively turned into ‘entirely from God!’ (intended to counter dualism), the closer return to the symbol of emanation. Actually, and remarkably, Barth’s positive understanding of ‘creation from nothing’ has a major point in common with ‘emanative monism’. Both symbols put the origin of all creative power solely in God just as the election of the true human being Jesus Christ is *ex nihilo nisi deo*. Thus, when emphasizing that behind “the awakened being of man … there is nothing … but God and His word”, Barth cannot resist observing that therefore humans are basically “not *ex nihilo* but very much *ex aliquo*” which is quite close to emanative imagery and, again, comes close to *ACIM*, now in its picture of God creating humans “by extending Himself” (4.1.c). Apparently, although Barth attempted to avoid both emanative monism and cosmological dualism, he nevertheless endows ‘creation from nothing’ with features that belong to both rejected theories.

Only Christ is eternally elected and ‘begotten’ in time *entirely from God*, while all ordinary humans are ‘created’ *entirely from nothing*. But ‘from nothing’ turns out to be *ex aliquo*, namely *from God*. Barth might turn himself in his grave, but I find it highly remarkable how close these hotly debated differences and opposing symbols (extension, election, begotten, created from nothing but entirely *de deo*, emanated from God) actually approach each other. I assume that behind the rejection of divine-human coeternity in the sense of ontological equality lies still another motif.

(ii) Barthian Actualism

Taking Jesus Christ, eternally elected, as the essential and normative representation of true human being, Barth analyzed ordinary human existence as stamped by the four forms of sloth (7.2.2.a). This led to a natural and lifelike, though obviously not flattering picture of actual humanity. As long as we have the initiative and live according to the ‘being’ we have in ourselves, we act as poor creators of good, while we are extremely capable as slothful sinners. It appears that, though God’s valid and effective direction in Christ is given to us, this does not mean that we have it at our disposal. What His direction concretely amounts to with respect to individual humans

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4 *CD* III/2,155 (185): “summoned into life by God” we become human, implying that we are “not God but distinct from God and therefore no part of or emanation from the divine being”. Moreover, as being summoned by God, we exist “through God and not apart from Him or independently of Him”. Indeed, the “root common to monism and dualism is here cut off”, but in a curious way since elements of both dualism (“distinct from”) and monism (“not apart from”) are used to mutually refute one another.
is not at all a ‘matter of fact’-reality to all. The ‘quality’ or ethical substance of a so-called ‘work of praise’ appears to be a random and rather unpredictable matter, possibly and often strongly differing from person to person as illustrated by the my exemplary ‘saint’ Samson (7.3.3.a). The content of an individual’s knowledge of God, and, similarly, the content of what is a ‘good work’, is independent of the receiver’s inner knowledge. It is not the result of a doer’s feeling or inclination. Instead, it is the divine Revealer, God in Jesus Christ, who stays in charge from beginning until the end: not only of what is revealed and directed, and consequently heard and done, but also of the question to whom. In all separate cases, God remains in control of both the content and the target of His direction. The goodness of a work is not due to human capacity, nor to one’s own inner quality, instead it “comes down from above into the human depths” (7.3.3.a). What is needed is an actual intervention from above, designated as divine actualism.

With respect to ‘knowing God’, Van der Kooi has pointed to the significant element of divine “actualism” involved in Barth’s perspective on divine Selbst-revelation, meaning that God must take the initiative, create the relationship and make Himself known.5 Theologically, Barth ascribed but little importance to human capacities,6 which not only implies denying natural knowledge of God and direct gnosis. In Barth’s discussion with Bonhoeffer and “the call to discipleship (7.3.2.b) it appeared that he also denied humans the initiative of taking a first step. Divine actualism is equally relevant in the bestowal on humans of a special assignment, as well as in giving the potential to fulfil it. Clearly, such a strong emphasis on the necessity of actual divine intervention is highly revealing with respect to Barth’s assessment of the human potential, as well as to his estimation of the nature and ‘power’ of our own endeavor and strivings. On this matter, Barth ever kept his strong restraint and deep suspicion against any bold or easy claim of Christian insight, progress, or good work supposedly achieved in fellowship with Christ or in service to true humanity. He was critical about the human role and potential not only in the early years of his career,7 culminating in the second edition of his radically critical Römerbrief8 (1922). But he showed the same caution against human self-conceitedness in his final days, when he had to choose a leading perspective for his discussion of ethics in Das christliche Leb-

5 Van der Kooi, As in a Mirror; 298 (Als in een Spiegel, 270). In Barthian theology, the only way to knowing God is “the self-unveiling which coincides with Christ”; also: 303 (274); with respect to Barth’s understanding of analogy, Van der Kooi observes that “ontologically it has its origin in God. It exists because God draws a relation … The analogy is thus not a latent quality of earthly reality” (303 (274)). Instead, when it occurs, it “is an analogy that is created ever anew by God in his gracious act” (299 (271)).

6 Van der Kooi, As in a Mirror, 432 (382).

7 See also CD IV/2, 547 (619), where Barth observes with respect to the call to discipleship that it depends on whether and how we are bound to Jesus. “And this binding to Jesus … comes to each individual in a highly particular way in his own particular time and situation. To this man He now gives – and this man now receives – this command …”; see also CD IV/2, 595f. (589) with respect to the essence of good works being “the fact that they are done as ordered and commanded by God”. Someone doing a good work means that “this particular man can and must and may and will on this particular occasion say this or do that or take up this particular attitude”.

8 See for the early development of Barth’s theological thinking: Van der Kooi, De Denkweg van de jonge Karl Barth, 50ff.

9 In the same year, he spoke about our “obligation and our inability” to speak the word of God. “We are human, however, and so cannot speak of God”, in a lecture delivered at a conference of ministers: “Das Wort Gottes als Aufgabe der Theologie”, translated in: The Word of God and the Word of Man, 186 (see 7.1.b).
After probing the term of human ‘faithfulness’ for some time, he then felt obliged to change and replace it by prayer or invocation (Anrufung Gottes).\(^\text{10}\) It shows that Barth has always stayed on guard not to let his major and ever central motif slip away: Living and acting as Christians according to Gods word and law cannot be based on anything - not even loyalty - on the human side, but only on Gods direction in Jesus Christ. We can participate, yes we can, though not as co-workers, mandataries or representing deputies, but only as witnesses. And even as such, we can be kept on course only by the lead of continuous prayer and actual divine intervention: Gott schafft sich Zeugen, keine Stellvertreter, keine Representanten und Garanten ....\(^\text{11}\)

This may suffice to explain that Barth’s severely critical account of human being better suited the other-worldly, even millenarian attitude of the New Age sensu strictu (2.1.1.a); and also, that it moved to the background, and received lesser and lesser recognition in the growingly optimistic, this-worldy and world-affirming context of the emerging New Age movement in the 1970s and further.

9.1.B Mediation (Tillich)

As is reflected by the many plus-minus scores in the Inventory Table, the motif or drive to mediate is omnipresent in Tillich’s work. Actually, ‘mediation’ even became his method, the method of correlation, according to which opposing realities, concepts, elements are explored and interpreted in particular by looking how they correspond, or even mutually interfere in meaning. Both as motif and as method, mediation colored all parts of his work. I will briefly describe its effect on his understanding of the divine-human relationship (i), and human potential (ii).

(I) Divine-human relationship: unity in duality

The central and basic motif in Tillich’s work appears in his omnipresent agenda of mediation, both theologically and philosophically, always connecting dialectical opposites in their complementary character. Though God and (wo)man, given their estrangement, are not seen as one in unbroken unity, it is also clear that they are inseparable, because no ontological strangers. Looking for correlation and mutual dialectic, Tillich is always intent on connection making: ontologically between the absolute and the conditioned, essence and existence; existentially between experience and revelation, culture and religion; scientifically between philosophy and theology, between the divine Logos and the universal reason in the universe and in (wo)man; and religiously, between break-through of the ultimate/God and Spiritual presence on the one hand, and all serious human concern on the other. In every distinction, polarity or opposition Tillich saw an agenda for correlation and bridging in order to better understand the opposing elements, in themselves, while exploring their mutual determination. In accord with the plus-minus in the Inventory Table (Qu. 1), Tillich’s cosmological perspective can be designated as ‘non-antagonistic dualism’ or ‘holistic pluralism’, to be further described in Part Four (see 10.2.b).

\(^{10}\) KD IV/4, XI: In first instance Barth had chosen for the notion “Treue” (loyalty, faithfulness, trueness) as leading perspective for the discussion of ethics (KD IV/4, 486); but half way he took pains to retreat his steps and reframe what he had written already under what – he felt – should be the leading perspective instead of human faithfulness, namely: Anrufung Gottes (worship) (KD IV/4, 69). The first notion, apparently, would make ethical life too dependent on human being and responsibility.

\(^{11}\) KD IV/4, 494f.
(II) **Human potential**

Both anthropologically and the-ontologically, Tillich defended a nuanced point of view, which is reflected by the plus-minus scores on all the concerning entries in the Inventory Table (Qu. 2, 3 and 4; Benchmark c).

With respect to the ontology of evil, he distinguished between absolute non-being which he denied, and relative non-being which he assigned an indispensable role in all being, even in the Ground of all being, in God (8.2.4.a; also 8.4.2.b). With a similar sense of inclusiveness, the reality of (original) sin is not pictured by him as an absolute separation or opposition from the divine but in terms of estrangement. Estrangement symbolizes a phenomenon which can only occur between former kin. This may ring a bit soft, but Tillich also stated boldly that estrangement is inevitable, since it is unavoidably implied in the transition from essence to existence: suggesting that creation implies fall (8.2.2.a).

The discussion that followed with Niebuhr and others (8.2.2.a, b; 8.2.3; and 8.2.4) concerned not only the ontology of evil and sin – and their disputed fatefulness - but also, and according to Tillich primarily, the dialectical unity of human freedom and destiny. The result of the discussion can be summarized by saying that, while Niebuhr criticized Tillich for depersonalizing humankind by putting it under a fateful domination of heteronomy, he (Niebuhr) himself emphasized the human person in his/her “unique capacity for freedom” (8.4.2.c) which, presumably unintended by him, tends towards human autonomy. Tillich however, neither depersonalizing nor absolutizing, localized the human being in the dialectic power field between freedom and destiny. Thus, as consciously living, subject-object oriented, psycho-physically based beings, we may think, decide and act as freely as we want to. And we may take into account as many aspects of reality as we can see – and still more when we are perfectionists. Even then, says Tillich, there is also the other side of destiny with elements that are beyond control. Therefore, our freedom is always limited. On the other hand, destiny, is limited, is not absolute. There is neither absolute freedom, nor absolute fate. Part of destiny is non-being, that is: relative nonbeing which includes potential being. And what, most importantly, also belongs to our destiny is the always possible breakthrough of something ultimate. God or something unconditional comes into our awareness and into existential experience as ultimate concern. Thus, Tillich grants the human person freedom that is limited through elements of destiny. Simultaneously, he put us under the impact of something unconditional, theologically speaking: under the lead of Spiritual presence. Tillich called this *theonomy* which qualifies his take of human potential. This amounts to the following.

What you actually do or potentially *can* do in faith is not resulting from absolute divine heteronomy (as in Barthian actualism, 9.1.a.ii) nor is it a matter of sheer autonomy of yourself. Even the saint, said Tillich, has to obey and accept revelation coming to him or against him, even the saint is shaken by the breakthrough of the ultimate. What is special and essential about saints is that in case of such breakthrough, saints will not just ignore or shrug their shoulders, they will not try to escape, apologize or withdraw themselves. Instead, when touched by an ultimate call, saints (like e.g., whistleblowers) go marching and acting themselves, in the direction that is shown to them and they feel they should go. Saints are those who keep faith and courage and

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12 In *Courage to be* Tillich observed that in life, in the realm of all being one finds “being and the negation of being and their unity” implying that “non-being is part of one’s own being”, see 8.2.4 intro.
when time comes, they recognize the decisive moment (Kairos).

I am not sure if Tillich ever used the term ‘co-creation’ but this term is perfectly matching with his notion of theonomy to the extent that co-creation is the outer effect of theonomy as the inner spiritual drive. Tillich described theonomy as “autonomous reason united with its own depth”. 13 It is divine guidance actively accepted and followed by humans, and if not realized, then at least seriously and passionately attempted in their actions. Within existence both theonomy and human concern are never complete or perfect, neither are they completely absent. Both are valid and determine the spiritual dynamic of human existence between the boundaries of destiny and limited freedom.

The picture drawn by Tillich concerning the divine-human relationship and human potential has, not only compared to Barth, but also as such and in itself, undeniable affinity with the main New Age perspectives on these very issues.

9.2. SOME MAIN CHARACTERISTICS/CONCEPTS OF PERSONHOOD

The present section on personhood is about the question: what actually do we mean – and more importantly, what do the sources mean when they speak of person (and related notions), be it in the affirmative or in the critical sense? Clearly, there is great divergence among the sources about what is attributed to human personhood and what not. The need of considering and clarifying the concept of personhood is given with the prominent role of the defining adjective “personal” in Plantinga’s concept of sin, I have taken as point of departure: sin is a culpable and personal affront to a personal God (see 1.1.2) Proceeding from this definition it follows that one’s concept of person will directly influence one’s concept of sin. If personhood of God or the human being is denied or dissolved, then sin is robbed of meaning by consequence.

So far, I have just followed the sources in their respective use of person. Thus, I simply took for granted that the reality of the “personal God” is naturally present in the formula Plantinga, while Roberts (following her entity Seth) stated with equal sense of conviction that there is “no personal God-individual”. At first sight, this seems to be a blunt denial of divine personhood, but on second thought it is far from clear what actually is implied. I think that both Barth and Tillich could agree with Roberts' denial of a “personal God-individual” although both theologians do not deny divine personhood and can speak in personal terms about and even to God. 14 Given these divergences between the sources, the possibility of commensuration is not a matter of course, with respect to both the reality/non-reality of sin, and their views on the divine-human relationship at large. Therefore, in order to localize their implicit or explicit notions of personhood, it is useful to give a brief account of some main views on ‘person’ in the history of philosophic anthropology (9.2 Some main views on personhood).

Moreover, commensuration and assessment of the sources on their ideas of personhood, becomes more likely and adequate, if we can find a concept of essential personhood that to some extent covers them all, or at least as many aspects of

13 See Tillich, ST I, 85 (103).
14 With regard to Barth, see e.g., Barthbrevier, edited by R. Grunow; there is a Tillich-Brevier as well (which I have not yet been able to acquire), see Seeberger/Lasson, Der Mensch zwischen Bedrohung und Geborgenheit: Ein Tillich-Brevier; also: Schüßler, “Das Paradox des Gebetes. Zu Paul Tillichs theonomer Gebetstheologie”, in: Theologie und Philosophie (Vierteljahresschrift) 68. Jahrgang, Heft 2, 1993, 242-246
them as possible. This search leads to the concept of personhood offered by Max Scheler (9.3 The Concept of Person and Spirit by Max Scheler). Actually, getting some acquaintance with the metaphysical anthropology of Scheler came to me as a surprise. In Part Four, I will use his picture of spirit-oriented personhood not only for commensuration of the sources (§10), but for a reformulation of sin (§11).

The history of theological thought and philosophic anthropology has yielded a nearly endless variety of concepts of what it is to be a divine person or a human being, to the extent of confusing nuance and shading. My aim in this section is to describe some main historical perspectives on ‘person’. Firstly, I will reflect on the entering of the concept of person in Christian theology (9.2.a Trinitarian personhood). Then, I will depict the classic anthropologies of Plato, Locke and Hume (9.2.b), followed by some modern developments (9.2.c). Now, a preliminary question which is also part of the problem of commensuration is a theological one, namely whether insights regarding personhood that are gained anthropologically can be applied theologically as well? This question will be addressed at the end of the survey (9.2.d Divine and Human personhood). I have made use in particular of

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### 9.2.a The threefold personhood of God

Within Christianity the notion person is originally used for Trinitarian conceptualization, thus not as an anthropological concept but primarily as a theological one. As such it was one of the many related terms and precisions in the highly complicated theological-philosophic process that culminated in the Trinitarian doctrine of three persons representing the one God. As illustration of unknowing confusion can serve Boethius’ famous definition *persona est naturae rationabilis individua substantia.*

After the Trinitarian and Christological debates with ever shifting relations of meaning between *physis/natura* and *upostasis/persona*, Boethius’ formula finally offered the clarity of a fixed definition containing both notions. But the gained clarity cannot take away that the meaning Boethius ascribed to ‘person’ (“individual substance”) is at least one-sided and perhaps even opposite to the original etymological meaning of *persona* (> *prosopon*, mask), which represented the role or character an actor was playing on stage, symbolized by the mask he was carrying. Thus Boethius emphasized the element of substance and individuality, while leaving unnoticed the element of relation.

The notion *persona* had entered Christian speech originally through the Septuagint in which the Greek equivalent of person (*prosopon*) was used as translation of the Hebrew word *paniem*. As a tool for bible interpretation, the notion entered Christian exegesis from antique Grammar, and took form in the

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15 *HWdPh*, 280: a person is the “individual substance of rational nature”.

16 *HWdPh*, 280. Moreover, one could say that Boethius’ formula contradicted Chalcedon as well, to the extent that it rather obscured than clarify how two individual natures in Christ could lead to only one person. This problem was solved by Leon from Byzantine’s stating that an individual nature can be part of an encompassing whole, and be enclosed in another person/hypostasis, thus laying the foundation for the theory of an/enhypostasy (280).

17 *HWdPh*, 339.

18 *HWdPh*, 274f
method of prosopographic exegesis. The prosopographic method was used in questions of verb and perspective of (apparently inner-)divine dialogue, in which the divine roles of speech are distinguished between the father and the son.\textsuperscript{19} Tertullian (160-220) was the first to also introduce the Holy Spirit as possible divine prosopon or speaker, thus pioneering the later Trinitarian form tres personae, una substantia.\textsuperscript{20} Tertullian further seems to have suggested that the three persons of the one divine monarchy might be interpreted according to the model of the state or empire, whose monarchy or power is also represented by different authorities or roles, designated as personae.\textsuperscript{21} In this line, the Cappadocian theologians went further. They distinguished the three equally divine speakers or persons according to their mutual relationship and function.\textsuperscript{22} Thus, the focus of thinking about the divine persons was inner Trinitarian. Not: the Trinitarian God is a person. Instead, “God” is represented by three authorities or speakers, three personal “modes of being”, namely as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{23}

\textbf{9.2.b Three classic perspectives on the human being or person}

On the one hand, there are so called ontological perspectives in which the human person is seen as a self-subsisting reality or substance (i. Plato). On the other hand, there are reductionist views according to which the reality to such personal substance is absolutely denied (iii Hume). And there are mediating views (ii Locke).

\textbf{9.2.b.1 Plato}

In full blown ontological views on what is a human being or person, as with Plato, it is assumed that a person is something self-subsisting, an immaterial substance. In the dialogue Phaedo Socrates’ friends ask him how they shall bury him. Socrates mildly replies: “however you please, if you can catch me and I do not get away from you”. Clearly, Socrates identifies himself not in the least with or as his body. He assures his friends that when they will sit mourning around his corpse, after his drinking the poison, he himself, the real Socrates who is right now still conversing with them and carefully formulating, will then literally be gone: “I shall no longer be with you, but shall go away to the joys of the blessed …”.\textsuperscript{24} According to Antony Flew, himself tending to a much more reductionist view of personhood, Socrates implied, firstly, that besides the body, and temporarily connected with it, there is the soul. This soul is incorporeal but nevertheless a “substance”, meaning that it is

\begin{enumerate}
\item[19] HWdPh, 275-276: The method sought to interpret texts in which God speaks in the plural (Gen.1). Or in which a second role or person is introduced inside the godly realm (Is. 53,1/ John 12,38). Until Irenaeus and Hippolytus only two divine prosopoi were employed.
\item[20] HWdPh, 276.
\item[21] HWdPh, 276f.
\item[22] HWdPh, 277f.: Father, Son and Holy Spirit relate to one another as Sun, Beam and Gleam, or as the Root, Trunk and Fruit of one substantial Tree.
\item[23] See e.g., Van den Brink & Van der Kooi, Christelijke Dogmatiek, 240; Pannenberg, Systematische Theologie I, 347 speaks of three "modes of being" (Seinsweisen), as part of one unique divine Subject (eines einzigen göttlichen Subjekts), though (as Father, Son and Holy Spirit) with a mutual distinction of self (wechselseitiger Selbstunterscheidung) also implying three independent centres of actuality. The three godly ‘persons’ are then to be seen as: Lebensvollzüge selbständiger Aktzentren. Pannenberg further surveys all conditional ins and outs that are to be considered in order to stay in sensible-rational line with tradition (see: 347-355).
\item[24] Borchert VII, art. by Anthony Flew, on Immortality, 602-616, 602
\end{enumerate}
something that can exist independently of anything else. The second implication is that my soul is the real, true or essential person I am, since according to Socrates the real person he genuinely is can “escape unharmed and unnoticed at death”. Thus, the soul is the (hidden) substance of a human person, implying that basically ‘I am my soul’ which is principally different from (only) ‘having’ a soul as an organ or attribute. It also implies a strong relativization of the importance of the body.

The conclusion is that ontological accounts of personhood, like Plato’s and later Descartes’, describe the human person predominantly or rather exclusively in terms of mental (and/or psychological) criteria, defining persons as “immaterial substances only contingently linked to their bodies.” Thus they adopted some form of substantiality of the immortal, disembodied soul. Clearly, the perspectives forwarded by Jane Roberts/Seth and in ACIM come very close to this, only that the true inner self or soul with Roberts is entirely open-ended and everchanging, whereas in ACIM my true inner spiritual identity is eternal and unchangeable.

9.2.B.II Locke

Compared to Plato’s (in medieval sense) realist-ontological view of substantial personhood, John Locke (1632-1704) can be seen as marking the transition towards more reductionist views. He described the human person as “a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places…” Thus, while still emphasizing the mental side of a person, Locke also focused on the aspect of identity as sameness, which asks for (physical) evidence and steers the attention towards the body. But Locke did not go as far as to state that bodily continuity is sufficient or decisive to state personal identity, witness his cobbler-prince thought experiment. Instead, one’s personal identity goes back as far as the recollection of one’s memories. Locke’s ideas have also proved seminal in the science of law, in legal issues as liability and accountability, premeditation and remembrance. With respect to the unity/identity problem, Locke was well aware of the fact that ‘identity’ of a human person does imply both sameness and change, not unlike the development of a tree, entirely changing (from seed, seedling to forest giant) while still remaining the same tree. Therefore, Locke

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25 Borchert VII, 602.
26 See Borchert VII, 603, especially Flew’s remark with regard to immortality, that anything less than the full identification of oneself as or with his/her soul, will debunk the consolation of believing in survival. Since, as Flew observes with some sardonic shrewdness, in case we would only ‘have’ a soul, the statement of its immortality would mean little more than “the rather less elevated assurance that my appendix is to be preserved eternally in bottle”.
27 Routledge VII, 320.
28 As said of Plato and Descartes, see Routledge VII, 318.
29 Borchert VII, 215, citing Locke’s Essay concerning Human Understanding, Ch. 27.
30 As Locke proved with the cobbler-prince thought experiment, see Borchert VII, 216: “Should the soul of a prince, carrying with it the consciousness of the prince’s past life, enter and inform the body of a cobbler … deserted by his own soul, everyone sees he would be the same person with the prince, accountable only for the prince’s actions”.
31 Borchert VII, 215)
32 I assume that the notion ‘legal person’ can be derived from Locke, given his “claim that ‘person’ is what he called a ‘forensic’ term … a morally responsible agent”. With respect to liability and personal responsibility, it seemed obvious to Locke that “what makes people accountable for their actions is their ability to recognize them as their own”, implying “an awareness of what one is doing when one is doing it, and … an ability to remember having done”; see Borchert VII, 216.
thought on the one hand that human identity consisting of such mobile phenomena as consciousness and memory, has to be carried or held together with at least some sort of substantive notion. On the other hand, he also acknowledged that it is far from easy to define what the substance of a human, and thus what exactly a person is. It led to ambivalence in Locke who saw the “inutility of the concept of substance” while still retaining it. The anthropological perspectives of Tillich and Fox mostly resemble the mediating position of Locke. So does the perspective by Scheler (see below 9.3),

9.2.b.iii Hume

A less inhibited reduction, rather a complete flattening of all hidden substantive notions can be found with David Hume (1711-1776). Disputing the claim that each person can find through introspection a sort of “unique and simple ‘self’”, Hume simply stated that he was unable to detect such notion of person or self in himself. According to him there is no such thing as a person with personal identity, instead people are “nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each another with an unconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement”. Only at this latter point, the prima facie association lies at hand with Roberts’ idea of the open ended identity of the true (inner) person as everchanging entity or network (or bundle) of evolving and interconnecting fragments of creative consciousness (3.1.c). But the intentionally sceptic and critical stance in Hume is more related to the ‘spirit’ of Barthian theology.

Ascribing some sort of substantial identity to the human mind is purely fictitious, according to Hume. The idea of an underlying substance constituting inner coherence in the perpetual flux of separated perceptions is a creation of our imagination. It is only afterwards and thanks to our memory that we introduce coherence into what we have seen, digesting our perceptions according to general principles of resemblance and causation. All ideas of substance proceed from the operation of imagination.

It seems to me that the controversy whether there is, or not, a ‘thing’ called personal ‘substance’ is largely analogous to the medieval arguments about the (non)reality of ‘universalia’, or discussions about the Kantian notion ‘Ding an sich’. As it is with these notions, the substance of whatever thing or reality is never something objectifiable in the phenomenal world but belongs to the hypothetical realm constructed by the mind, the noumenal world of (inter-)subjective imagination. Even more clearly than the notion Ding an sich, is the notion ‘substance’ (literally: ‘something standing under’) a symbolic expression, simultaneously stating and denying the literal existence of its referent. Therefore, the ontological extremes of either denying or proclaiming the reality of substance appear to me as equally one-sided and inadequate. More profitable is it to ask what are the identifying characteristics in both cases. Thus, the relevant question - for those who ontologically adopt the individual soul as substance of human being;

33 Borchert VII, 215; 217: Given his preference for memory, Locke held on to a notion of “spiritual rather than material substance” but it seems that Locke simultaneously denied “that we have any knowledge of what substance is like, since our knowledge is restricted to the qualities of things”.
34 Hume’s Treatise of Human nature (Book I, Part IV, Sec. 6), cited in: HWdPh 7, 305; also Borchert 7, 218
35 HWdPh 7,306; citing from A treatise of human nature: “Had we no memory, we never shou’d have any notion of causation, nor consequently of that chain of causes and effects, which constitute our self or person”.
36 See Tillich’s concept of symbol (8.1.1.e) partly based on what he called paradoxical concepts (8.1.1.d), in order to address religious or metaphysical truth.
and precisely the same question for reductionist perspectives taking the human person as nothing but a bundle of many experiences – for both the relevant question to be asked is: whether their intended ‘object’ contains a recognizable modulus or nature? Is there a continuous ‘quality of characteristics’ that can be taken as defining or identifying either their absolute ‘soul’ or contingent ‘bundle’? These questions, actually, steer away from focusing on a strictly formal substance, and direct us towards a more material approach of personhood. They also bring us to the concept of identity, but not in the formal sense of ‘sameness’ but in a more material sense as quality, nature, concern or even ‘spirit’ or spiritual attitude. This will come to the fore in last section (9.3 The concept of Spirit and Person by Max Scheler). But first I will mention some further varieties and developments of the ontological and the reductionist path.

9.2.c MODERN DEVELOPMENTS
Later modern developments can be seen one way or the other as continuing one of the three classic approaches. American personalism (i) is the attempt to continue the ontological view. The reductionist or sceptical view can be recognized in analytic-philosophically inspired anthropologies (ii). Most commonly adopted is a combination of both sides resulting in anthropologies that emphasize the human being as socio-psycho-physical unity (iii).

9.2.c.I AMERICAN PERSONALISM
The ontological or substantial view on person as defined by Boethius (480-524) was adopted by Thomas, in Europe influenced by R.H. Lotze (1817-1881) emphasizing personality and value, and further developed by thinkers as B.P. Bowne and his pupil E.S. Brightman (1884-1953) in America. In the latter setting, it led to the Christian-religiously inspired philosophical perspective of personalism stating that “person is the ontological ultimate and … personality … the fundamental explanatory principle”. Persons are seen as “simple (non-composite), of an intrinsic worth not equalled by nonpersons, and at least one of their number is ontologically ultimate”. “Realistic personalism” was explicitly favoured in the Neo-scholastic resurgence of Catholic theological thought, as flourishing in the first part of the previous century. In this Neo-scholastic way of thinking reality is ascribed to the supernatural realm, and the spiritual realm of persons, with equal (or even deeper) sense of plausibility than to the physical, natural order of non-mental or non-personal being.

One early personalist G.H. Howison (1834-1916), thinking from an anti-Hegelian point of view, perceived human minds or persons as having “no origin at all – no source in time whatever …”. There is “nothing … prior to them, out of which their being arises”. Reminiscent of Origen’s doctrine of the pre-existence of souls, Howison could speak of the community of persons as an “eternal republic”. This inadvertently

37 What I have in mind comes close to a distinction made by Ricoeur between “sameness” (Gleichheit) versus “selfhood” (Selbsheit), as discussed by Jansen, Talen naar God, 215. In Dutch the distinction is described by Jansen as “identiteit-idem en identiteit-ipse”.
38 HWdPh 7, 339; Routledge 7, 315; 317.
39 Borchert 7, 233.
40 Routledge 7, 315.
41 Borchert, 7 (Personalism), 234; 233; for example, in France by the philosopher and political thinker Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) who was both an exponent and interpreter of Thomism.
42 Borchert 7, 235; also: Routledge 7, 317: According to Howison, in order to be a free moral agent, a person could not depend for existence on God. Therefore, he saw God as “an example of the moral ideal – a sort of Aristotelian final cause rather than an efficient cause, a standard of perfection but not
reminds one of the spiritual and unchangeable reality according to *A Course in Miracles*, the eternal Kingdom Sonship of God and all his (male and female) sons (see § 4).

Mostly regarded as founder of American personalism, also designated as “personal idealism”43 is Border Parker Bowne (1847-1910). Portraying human persons as “self-conscious agents”, he also professed “a personal God being the ultimate source of all finite being”. He emphasized human self-consciousness, in particular in religious and moral experience, as the most adequate starting-point for gaining (metaphysical) knowledge of the nature of things, since in the self-awareness of persons “lies the basis of knowledge and the proximate source of continuity through change, a personal God …”.44 Bowne taught on the one hand that as human persons “we have thoughts and feelings and volitions that are inalienable our own”, implying that we have some self-control and power of self-direction. Accordingly, we do have “a certain self-hood and a relative independence”. On the other hand, Bowne maintained “that we cannot regard ourselves as self-sufficient and independent in any absolute sense”45. It seems that these two elements in Bowne’s view on human person and existence largely converge with Tillich’s ontological polarity of (limited) freedom and destiny. Bowne, further, saw God as the creator of finite selves or persons, and simultaneously as “the world ground whose self-directing intelligent agency shows itself in the order and continuity of the phenomenal world”.46

Clearly, Bowne is not easy to pinpoint. He criticized philosophical perspectives (like Hegelian absolutism, evolutionism, materialism) equally hard as he fought against fundamentalism and dogmatic supernaturalism. But he remained “explicitly theistic”, a personalist for whom God is primarily the highest Divine Person47. Between the personal Deity and ordinary human persons remains a clear distinction, as remains always between mind and mind. Thus, Bowne was convinced that “no mind can be part of any other mind” since “each is distinct from every other”. Therefore, the notion of one single “cosmic mind” of which all individual minds are a piece or partial manifestation, and to which they will return, is rejected by Bowne as incoherent.48 Persons are the highest and simultaneously irretrievably basic elements of (human) reality. Clearly, this outcome is rather divergent from the ever-changing entities of consciousness as suggested by Roberts.

### 9.2.c.II Analytic-philosophical anthropologies

Hume, like Locke, still discussed ‘person’ as belonging to the realm of ‘mind’.49 His real point in denying the reality of person as a “unique and simple self” was his denial of personal identity as sameness through time, since the “bundle” of perceptions that I am (or have) at time-1 is not identical to the bundle I am some years later

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43 Borchert 7, 234.
44 Routledge 7, 315.
45 Routledge 7, 315.
46 Borchert 7, 235.
47 Borchert, 235.
48 Routledge, 317; Bowne perspective was to “explain the existence of finite minds by the creative action of an infinite mind …and … that this mind intended to produce creatures like ourselves. Thus, we are led to believe in a personal God possessed of intelligence and will and … moral goodness”.
49 Borchert 7, 220.
- at time-2. Now, in order to uphold identity, an obvious counter argument against Hume can be made by including the ‘body’ in the definition of person, or even letting identity be carried by the body. The implied physical definition of personal identity was much debated by analytic-philosophical thinkers in the twentieth century. Discussions were illumined with various puzzle cases and thought experiments, such as the logical speculation about brain transplantation as provided by Sydney Shoemaker (1931- ), or through sophisticated fantasy about reduplication or fission of persons, as initially suggested by Bernard Williams (1929-2003), further elaborated by Derek Parfit (1942- ).

With his so-called reduplication argument, Williams objected in particular to the idea of “personal identity that entailed the possibility of reincarnation”. Such ‘identity’ would have to consist in psychological links between the original person and his/her supposed reincarnation. But, according to Williams, it is theoretically imaginable and possible that there are two (or even more) equally good candidates to offer new incarnation, two “people bearing just the same psychological links to the earlier person”. Thence, Williams concluded that “since two people cannot be identical with one [original] person, no such account [of reincarnation] can provide a sufficient condition of personal identity”. Parfit and others went further, saying that the reduplication argument has a much wider application than intended by Williams. If the argument is valid with regard to reincarnation, then also regarding other forms of (survival of) personal identity that can be presented as a conceivably duplicable (or one-many form of) relation. The implication, very much in the spirit of Hume, would be that personal identity is refuted altogether. Parfit’s intention, though, was not a blunt denial. What he actually suggested was that “personal identity may be indeterminate”; also that identity as sameness is not the solely essential point in survival. What is relevant for survival, according to Parfit, is “a relation of psychological connectedness-cum-continuity”. Here, one is inadvertently reminded of Jane Roberts asking what remains of her Jane Roberts ‘self’ when evolving into higher networks with other entities of consciousness (see 3.1.c).

9.2.c.III Theories of person as socio-psycho-physical composite

Flanking or intermingled with the affirmative-ontological and/or the reductionist perspectives, many intermediate or mixed perspectives have been developed in the twentieth century, defining person in a multi-disciplinary way, and as a multifaceted entity. In these perspectives, the focus is not so much on identity as sameness, but quality. Who and what are you as person? What makes you into a person? What is essential to being a human person? In the more recent views of the previous century,
'personhood' is no longer defined in terms of either essentially mental, or physical. Instead, it became widely accepted to state that the human person is a psycho-physical unity, consisting of both mental and physical aspects\textsuperscript{54}. Besides, the aspects of social context and relationship came to be considered as greatly important. Thus, persons are described not primarily as individual but basically as being in relation to others.

Actually, this aspect which was a prominent characteristic of the Trinitarian persons (see 9.2.1)\textsuperscript{55}, and was suppressed for long since Boethius’ formula, can be seen as recovering the original idea of \emph{persona} as mask, signifying the role that is played in relationship with others. Until the end of the Middle Ages, definitions of person contained various key elements like ‘existence … rational nature, individuality, incommunicability, substantiality, dignity’\textsuperscript{56}. But none of them explicitly emphasized the notion of relationality. One of the first philosophers explicitly pointing to ‘being in relation with’ as the essence of personhood was D.F. Strauss (1808-1874) stating that one is a person only in the company of one’s likes\textsuperscript{57} which can be seen as an anticipation of Buber’s concentration on the relation between I and You, in particular the intimate situation of being in dialogue. Some thinkers have radicalized the distinction between person and individual to the extent that ‘person’ reflects the more relational view, while ‘individual’ is rather associated with the substantial view.\textsuperscript{58} I will mention some main philosophic-anthropological perspectives of the twentieth century, and then comment on their usefulness.

P.F. Strawson (1919-2006) described person as a primitive or non-compound entity to which both physical characteristics can be ascribed, as well as psychology oriented states of consciousness.\textsuperscript{59} According to Lynne R. Baker (1944 - ) being a person presupposes the ability to take on a so called “first person perspective”\textsuperscript{60}. According to Baker, seeing oneself as oneself

\textsuperscript{54} Thus Routledge 7, 306, 320: A person is “a psychophysical entity which is essentially physically embodied”.

\textsuperscript{55} See \textit{HWdPh} VII, 277f.: Especially the Cappadocians emphasized that the special character of each hypostasis or \emph{persona} in the Holy Trinity depends on its relationship to the other persons.

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{HWdPh} VII, 288: the mentioning of a certain ‘dignity’ stems from the definition by the so called \textit{Magistri}, theologians from the network around Alexander of Hales. It adds a material content to the concept of person: \emph{persona est hypostasis distincta proprietate ad dignitatem pertinente}. A ‘person’ is someone who is distinguished through a certain dignity (\textit{Würde}) or social recognition. The person of a King is different from the person of a minister, the person of the Father is different from the person of the son. Clearly, one’s dignity is closely connected to role one plays. A non-relational aspect was emphasized by Richard of St.Victor: \emph{persona est intellectualis naturae incommunicabilis existentia} – the incommunica (or unique) existence of an intellectual nature (\textit{HWdPh} VII, 284). Richard criticized Boethius’ formula based on “substance” with reference to Trinitarian personhood stating that all three persons in the Holy Trinity do share one and the same godly substance. Each divine person, therefore, cannot be defined as a separate substance of its own. (\textit{HWdPh} VII, 285)

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{HWdPh}, 339: Strauss: “\emph{eine Person ist dies nur dadurch, dass sie andere von ihresgleichen sich gegenüber hat}”.

\textsuperscript{58} See \textit{HWdPh}, 339, referring to Karl Löwith (1928).

\textsuperscript{59} Borchert 7, 238; see also Ayer, \textit{The Concept of a Person and other Essays}, 85f: Strawson held “that the subject to which we attribute the properties which imply the presence of consciousness is literally identical with that to which we also attribute physical properties. And if we ask what this subject is, the only correct answer is just that it is a person”.

\textsuperscript{60} Borchert 7, 239; Baker distinguished between two grades of first-person perspective. The weaker form is when P says: “I am 6 foot, 2 inches tall”, implying that P is able to distinguish himself (P) from others. But a stronger form of first-person perspective is at stake when P says: “I wish I were 6 foot, 2 inches tall”. The latter expression implies, firstly that P sees that P is distinct from others, secondly, that P sees P as P.
is the core of self-consciousness and is a major “person-making characteristic”. A related notion that is also widely considered as essential to personhood, is freedom of will in some form. In this connection, Harry G. Frankfurt (1929 - ) distinguished between “first order -” and “second order volitions”. Example of the first is the desire of a regular smoker to fill his pipe and put fire to the content of its bowl (R desires to X). Next to such first order desire – and closely referring to it – one can also have the desire to quit smoking say for health reasons (R desires not to desire X). When this second order desire comes to be R’s will, it results in a “second order volition” which according to Frankfurt is “a sufficient condition for personhood”.

Another contribution to the theory formation on personhood is the distinction made by Daniel Dennett (1942 - ) between metaphysical and moral persons. The former is the more formal “notion of an intelligent, conscious feeling agent”. A moral person roughly refers to “an agent who is accountable, who has both rights and responsibilities”. Michael Tooley (1941 - ) tended to change this order believing that “a person may be defined as a being who possesses at least moral rights (and perhaps moral responsibilities)”. This change of order is relevant to include unborn children, disabled persons, or elderly people suffering from dementia.

So far, these philosophical views of personhood are scarcely helpful to commensurate the studied sources and their forms of person. If being a person must essentially include having a body or physical existence, then anthropologies that are primarily or even exclusively ‘mind’ or ‘spirit’ oriented - as in the case of Roberts and ACIM - cannot be taken into account. The perspective of the first-person consciousness according to Baker is hardly commensurable with the self-awareness or direct gnosis one can have of the higher self or soul (as in the case of Roberts), or with the knowledge of oneself as unchangeable part of the Sonship and son of God (as in ACIM). Actually, all perspectives that emphasize individual self-consciousness as outer subject-object consciousness are more or less alien to these two sources of New Age. In the case of Barthian theology, a similar observation can be made with respect to the knowledge I can have of my true and genuine self which I can only find as realized in Jesus Christ. This is self-awareness of who I am de iure, whereas Baker’s “seeing oneself as oneself” presumably comes closer to Barth’s awareness of the one I am de facto.

9.2.d Divine and Human Personhood: commensurable concepts?

And there is an even more fundamental, as well as preliminary, theological-hermeneutical problem to be addressed, since even when we agree to a certain perspective on the human person, there is no guarantee that such anthropological invention is also valid with regard to the divine person, God. We may like to think bottom up, describing human personhood and then project it onto God, saying that in an analogous way to human personhood God is also person. But according to both theologians we should think the other way around. As according to Barth’s analogy of faith: even when we unanimously claim to know what a human person is, this gives us no knowledge about God, or about what person He is. Rather, it is God who is primarily and really person, and humans only become person secondarily, in a derived way, by relating or corresponding to him. This implies that the concept of person we are looking for - which to certain extent can be applied to both divine and human personhood - should take

61 Borchert 7, 240.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 Borchert 7, 241.
a theological-metaphysical (or ontological) rather than anthropological-philosophical starting point. Basically, such was also the conviction of Tillich, adopting a similar structure in which priority lies with the divine or Ground of being.65 This brings us to the theonomous anthropology offered by Max Scheler.

9.3 The Concept of Person and Spirit by Scheler

Surveying the main views on human personhood, it was the picture drawn by Scheler that drew my attention in particular, for its acknowledgment of practically all relevant aspects presented by others. Moreover, it happens to integrate and combine many of the elements and focal issues that are highlighted in the five sources of my study. In the present section I will give a brief and general account of Scheler’s metaphysical anthropology, partly based on secondary literature, in particular a study by Felix Hammer;66 and on Scheler’s last work Man’s Place in Nature, published after his death.67 In Part Four, I will use Scheler’s spirit oriented picture of personhood for commensuration and assessment of the sources (§10) and apply it for my attempt at a reformulation of the concept of sin. Hammer’s account covers Scheler’s œuvre at large, in particular the first and larger part of Scheler’s career when he joined the Catholic Church and defended a theistic image of God. In the final decade of his life, Scheler left the Church, rejected theism and adopted a form of en-theism. This change is documented in Man’s place in Nature, which will be my special concern. Below in 10.2-intro, I will briefly comment on Scheler’s development from a theistic to en-theistic perspective.

The theological-metaphysical view on human being by Max Scheler (1874-1928) is characterized by Hammer as a “theonous doctrine of person” (theonome Personlehre).68 According to Hammer, Scheler’s concept of person is primarily applied to God. Personhood is simply “the form of God’s being”, God being “the infinite person as such”69. Humans are ‘person’ in a secondary or derived sense. Thus, Scheler reversed the religion-critical idea of projection. Instead of projecting a human characteristic onto God, rather a divine category is transferred to human being,70 since in the most original sense only God is person (Ur-Person).71 With similar direction of dependency, Scheler could also use the notion ‘person’ as philosophical formulation for the imago Dei, again, implying that humans are created after the original image of God.72 Scheler’s theological-metaphysical derivation of the human person has some

65 Though in the text I follow the argument by Barth, Tillich basically adopted a similar approach in his lecture “The Conquest of the Concept of religion in the Philosophy of Religion” (= Die Überwindung des Religionsbegriff in der Religionsphilosophie” (1922), when stating that even philosophy of religion has to start with the Unconditional (God) and not with the conditioned reality of human religion (see: § 8.1.1.a).
68 Hammer, Theonome Anthropologie?, 89.
69 Hammer, o.c., 65: Die Person ist einfach die ‘Seinsform’ Gottes, Gott ist ‘DIE (‘einzige’, nicht zahlen-
maßigen ‘eine’) unendliche Person schlechthin.
70 Hammer, o.c., 67.
71 Hammer, o.c., 65.
72 Hammer, o.c., 67f. In some way similar to Tillich, Scheler had the tendency to translate biblical expressions into philosophical concepts. In a broad sense, ‘person’ is the philosophical notion for the biblical expression God’s children, especially “children of light” in contrast to “children of this world” as in
similarity to Barth’s *analogia fidei*, and is valid for the three main characteristics of personhood offered by Scheler.

The essence or core-element of human personality is its spiritual nature, its *Geistigkeit* (section 9.3.b) which – in theonomous dependency – is derived from the personal spirit of God, the personal God being spirit.\(^{73}\) Spirit and person are often used synonymously.\(^{74}\) In close connection with spirit, two further characteristics that are theologically assigned to God as *Ur-person*, are also attributed to human personhood. These are the spirit-person’s trans-objectivity (or *Leibüberhobenheit*), also designated as its psycho-physical indifference (9.3.c); and its pure actuality (*Aktualität*) (9.3.d).\(^{75}\) These three characteristics express Scheler’s view on the human person both in the first part of his life and in the latter, both before and after his turn away from the Church which was also a turn from traditional theism to pan-en-theism. The three characteristics will be used, on the one hand, to explain the divine-human relationship and on the other to indicate the place of humans within the rest of nature. But before presenting the three characteristics, it is helpful to note how Scheler positioned himself in the anthropological discussions of his time (9.3.a). And after introducing the core elements of his anthropology, I will go into the question of identity as sameness and/or quality (9.3.e).

### 9.3.a Scheler’s Position in the Anthropological Field

Scheler followed his own course over against two anthropological views, while also distancing himself from the traditional (Christian) view of the immortal soul. On the one hand he rejected the mechanistic-dualistic view inspired by Descartes’ distinction of thinking and extension as two distinct substances. Strictly separating mind (soul) and body, Descartes had disconnected all psychic life from physical life. By simply stating “psycho-mechanical” parallelism of body and soul, he had left the question of coordination or interaction between processes of the mind and of the body totally unanswered\(^{76}\). Against this dualistic anthropology, Scheler agreed to a large extent with philosophic, medical and natural-scientific developments of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, taking a much more holistic view.\(^{77}\) The human being him/her/itself had come to be seen as a psycho-physical unity,\(^{78}\) body and mind being inextricably connected by a whole system of conscious and unconscious, instinctive drives, totally unseen or denied by Descartes.\(^{79}\) Regarding the place of humankind vis-à-vis the rest of nature, Scheler both agreed and significantly disagreed with the new insights. He agreed that, though in a lesser degree than humans, animals too have intelligence and make choices based on psychic life.\(^{80}\) Regarding body, mind, intelli-

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\(^{73}\) Hammer, *o.c.*, 72: Spirit (*Geistigkeit*) as essence of the human person is based by Scheler “auf den personalen Geist Gottes .... ‘Das grundlegendste ... Attribut Gottes ist das Attribut der Geistigkeit’ im Sinne eines ‘personalen Gottes, der Geist ist ...’. NB: After abandoning faith, Scheler derived Spirit from “the ultimate Ground of Being”, see below 9.3.b.

\(^{74}\) Hammer, 97.

\(^{75}\) Hammer, 69.

\(^{76}\) Scheler, *Man’s Place*, 75.

\(^{77}\) Scheler, *o.c.*, 74.

\(^{78}\) Scheler, *o.c.*, 78.

\(^{79}\) Scheler, *o.c.*, 76.

\(^{80}\) Scheler, *o.c.*, 71f.
gence, choice, and psychic life, there is no more than gradual difference between hu-
man and animal being, which actually was the Darwinian-Lamarckian view. But on
the other hand, Scheler principally and basically opposed the evolutionary perspective
by introducing a “genuinely new phenomenon” or “principle” which he declared to be
the essence of human personhood in contrast to all other being. With this new typical-
ly human-personal principle Scheler did not mean a substance like the immortal soul
which he rejected.

9.3.B Spiritual nature of person
Thus, with respect to the place of humans within the natural world, Scheler coun-
tered the Darwinian-Lamarckian view stating that, compared to all non-human forms
of life, there is a really new principle that supplies for the essence of human life – in
Scheler’s own words:

The new principle transcends what we call ‘life’ in the most general sense. It is not a stage
of life, especially not a stage of the particular mode of life called psyche, but a principle
opposed to life as such, even to life in man. Thus, it is a genuinely new phenomenon which
cannot be derived from the natural evolution of life, but which, if reducible to anything,
leads back to the ultimate Ground of Being of which ‘life’ is a particular manifestation. …
We will use a more inclusive term and call it ‘spirit’ – a term which includes the concept of
reason, but which, in addition to conceptual thought, also includes the intuition of essences
and a class of voluntary and emotional acts such as kindness, love, remorse, reverence,
wonder, bliss, despair and free decision. The centre of action in which spirit appears within
a finite mode of being we call ‘person’ in sharp contrast to all functional vital centres which,
from an inner perspective, may be called ‘psychic centres’.

Being managed by or inspired with the principle ‘spirit’ (Geist) makes humans to
persons which marks the distinction from animal life. With respect to the first part of
Scheler’s career, the human S/spirit-directed-person marks so to speak a “flowing
dynamic transition” between two realms of being: God and world. As such, as spir-
itual persons, humans are marked off from all other (organic-animal) life and so to
speak localized on the side of the divine. As part of this, two accompanying essentials

81 Scheler, o.c., 35.
82 HWdPh, 314; Man’s place, 78; According to Scheler there is no reason “to ascribe to this [human]
body-soul the special origin or future that we find in the theistic doctrine of creation or in the traditional
doctrine of immortality”.
83 Compared to the Greeks, who according to Scheler, called this principle “reason”. But this will not do
since “between the clever chimpanzee and an Edison, taking the latter only as a technician, there is
only a difference in degree …”, Man’s Place, 36, both main text and footnote (between brackets: page
number in the German edition: 39).
84 Man’s Place, 36f. (38f)
85 Why do I write S/spirit with a capital/small letter S/s? In German language spirit is “geist”, which as
noun is always capitalized. In his first period, Scheler could simply identify Geist with/as the Spirit of
God, Holy Spirit. After his conversion he derived his “principle” Geist from the Ground of Being (It
falls back, as he put it in German, nur auf den obersten einen Grund der Dinge selbst …, auf densel-
ben Grund, dessen eine grosse Manifestation das ‘Leben’ ist (see: Die Stellung …, 39). Thus, we can
plausibly assume that Scheler’s principle spirit (Geist) is nurtured either from Christian-theology or
Humanistic-idealistic philosophy or from both. In order to indicate this double origin, I have written
’S/spirit’.
86 Hammer, o.c., 82f.: we should consider his picture of person as “einen fließenden dynamischen Über-
gang zwischen zwei Seinskreisen …: Gott und Welt”.

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that belong to S/spirit are also ascribed to the human spirit-person.

9.3.c PSYCHO-PHYSICAL INDIFFERENCE

The most essential characteristic of S/spirit is its psycho-physical indifference, implying that as S/spirit-oriented person, I transcend my actual existence, both my body (Leibüberhobenheit), and my ego-self. Thus, as person I do not coincide with my body, neither with my conscious I or psychic self. Instead, as S/spirit carrying person, a human being is able to go beyond himself as an organism and to transform, from a centre beyond the spatiotemporal world, everything (himself included) into an object of knowledge. Thus, man as a spiritual being is a being that surpasses himself in the world. As such he is capable of irony and humour …

Implied in the - relative to psycho-physical reality - transcendent or “ex-centric” position of the human spirit-person is its existential liberation from the organic world – its freedom and detachability from the bondage and pressure of life, from its dependence upon all that belongs to life, including its own drive-motivated intelligence. The spiritual being, then, is no longer subject to its drives and its environment. Instead, it is ‘free from the environment’ or, as we shall say, ‘open to the world’. Such a being has a ‘world’.

Clearly, freedom from the psycho-physical world as implied by Scheler is not meant to trivialize the outer world (Roberts), and goes certainly not as far as declaring it illusory (ACiM). Having a world implies that the spirit driven person “is capable of transforming the primary centres of resistance and reaction into ‘objects’”. Where-

87 Hammer, o.c., 71
88 Hammer, o.c., 85ff, speaks of “die psychophysische Indifferenz als Ausdruck der Ich- und Leiblosigkeit der Person”.
89 Scheler, o.c., 46ff (48).
90 What Scheler expressed in metaphysical-theological terms (speaking of “spirit” having its proper origin and place elsewhere in the divine region or Ground of Being) was also implied by his contemporary H. Plessner. But Plessner introduced a less metaphysical and non-religious symbol: “ex-centricity” (die exzentrische Position des Menschen), implying that while (higher) animals have their centre of action entirely within themselves, humans basically exist (from) beyond themselves, see Pannenberg, W., Anthropologie in theologischer Perspektive, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: 1983, 34f.
91 Scheler, o.c., 37 (39).
92 In two ways, there is close affinity with Tillich, firstly concerning the distinction of human from other animal life, depending on the ontological polarity dynamics versus form. The element ‘dynamics’ is explained by Tillich as the combination of vitality and intentionality: “Vitality, in the full sense of the word is human because man has intentionality. The dynamic element in man is open in all directions … Man is able to create a world beyond the given world … The dynamics of subhuman life remain within the limits of natural necessity, notwithstanding the infinite variations it produces and notwithstanding the new forms created by the evolutionary process. Dynamics reaches out beyond nature only in man. (italics, ibid.) This is his vitality, and therefore man alone has vitality in the full sense of the word” (see: ST I, 180 (212)). But the “psycho-physical indifference” (Leibüberhobenheit) of S/spirit has a second, more interior implication, namely of transcending and transforming everything: “himself included”, nt. 89 – see further main text and nt. 94.
as non-personal or non-spiritual organisms remain immersed in their environment and governed by their psycho-physical system of vital drives, organs, and senses, the spirit-person does approach and treat all reality from a detached position: not only the outer reality of the senses but also the inner psychic reality of one’s I or ego. Spirit only belongs, says Scheler “to a being capable of strict objectivity”. This objectivity (Sachlichkeit) which in particular includes the ability of taking a distanced position to oneself in “self-consciousness”, is so to speak a precondition for a spiritual person in order to ‘act’. From beyond time, as well as from beyond what already exists, but according to the identity of his/her S/spirit, a person performs acts, introducing and realizing them into time and existence. With this we have arrived at a further essential characteristic namely that the essential spirit of a person only is and lives in the execution of intentional acts.

9.3.d Actuality

To the extent that animal behaviour is instinctively preconditioned, animal action is basically re-action, steered by impulses, evoked by the animal’s direct environment. This implies that animals are never in the full sense acting subjects but always to a certain extent (reacting) objects. But humans can really act, namely from a centre which is not part of this world.

Spirit is the only being incapable of becoming an object. It is pure actuality. It has its being only in and through the execution of its acts. The centre of spirit, the person, is not an object or a substantial kind of being, but a continuously self-executing, ordered structure of acts. The person is only in and through his acts. … Psychic acts are capable of objectification, but not the spiritual act – the intentionality itself which makes the psychic process visible.

It is important to notice that not only the spirit-person but even the spiritual act is said to be not objectifiable (gegenstands unfähig). Thus, in contrast to a visibly socio-psycho-physical act – say, of offering my condolences - the effective spiritual act behind it, the spiritual intention that causes my visit, is not objectifiable. It is possible that, belonging to the same local community, I deeply disliked the deceased and nevertheless pay my respects. In this case my S/spirit acts by giving “direction” to my psychic impulses by navigating them. It is also possible that I barely

93 Scheler, o.c., 37 (40: Geist ist daher Sachlichkeit, Bestimmbarkeit durch dat Sosein von Sachen selbst. Geist “hat” nur rein zu vollendeter Sachlichkeit fähiges Lebewesen).
94 Scheler, o.c., 40: self-consciousness implies “the consciousness that the spiritual centre of action has of itself”. Personal self-consciousness as intended by Scheler means that a person does “own itself”, a real spirit or person is “its own master”. Here lies the second and much deeper digging point of affinity with Tillich, namely with his perspective on “final revelation” which presupposes the “power of negating itself without losing itself”. Accordingly, that Jesus is Christ turned out most clearly in that he was prepared to sacrifice what was Jesus in Him to his mission as Christ (see 8.1.2.a.iii).
95 To ‘act’ as ‘person’ in this sense of Scheler, according to spiritual objectivity also with respect to oneself, also comes close to what H.G.Frankfurt described as “second order volition”, see above 9.2.c.iii (nt. 62).
96 See HWdPh, 314.
97 Hammer, Theonome Anthropologie, 82, citing Scheler: “Zum Wesen der Person gehört, dass sie nur existiert und lebt im Volzug intentionaler Akte ... “ (Scheler, Der Formalismus ..., GW II, 389f.).
98 Scheler, Man’s place, 47 (49: Der Geist ist das einzige Sein, das selbst gegenstands unfähig ist, - er ist reine, pure Aktualität, hat sein Sein nur im freien Vollzug seiner Akte).
know the mourning family, but since I highly treasure ideas and values of compassion and community building, I decide to go. In this case, as spiritual person, I actively give “guidance” (Leitung) to my outer behaviour. But in both cases, as Scheler makes clear, the spirit has no power or energy of its own. It can only try to make use of existing “energy complexes which will then act through the organism in order to accomplish what the spirit ‘wills’”.

Both examples reveal a highly remarkable and most essential element of Scheler’s perspective on spirit(-person), namely that, on the one hand, spirit has no executive or “original creative power” of its own. On the other hand, Scheler emphasized that “spirit is autonomous in its being and laws”. Thus spirit has no overriding, in the sense of executive authority but it does have moral authority. This means that in the sense of ideas and values – i.e. according to her/his spirit - a human person is (seen as) entirely autonomous.

Discussing the spirit’s (outer) powerlessness, Scheler stated that it was the fallacy of originally Greek philosophy to grant autonomous power to the “idea”, based on the view “that the (rational) idea has an original power, activity and energy”. After his abdication, Scheler also rejected the theistic Judaeo-Christian version of this view, according to which God is not only Spirit giving guidance and direction, but also “endowed with a positive, creative, yes, all-powerful will”. In contrast to this, Scheler maintained that S/spirit as such has no power or creative energy of its own. In order to achieve something, S/spirit has to make use of instinctual or other energies of the weaker or lower forms of being. These lower forms, taken together as the “vital impulse”, belong to the Ground of Being “as intimately as the spiritual principle” itself. Framed in religion-metaphysical terms, Scheler concluded:

Spirit, originally impotent, and the demonic drive, originally blind to all spiritual ideas and values, may fuse in the growing process of ideation, or spiritualization, in the sublimation of the drives and in the simultaneous actualization, or vitalization, of the spirit. This interaction and exchange represent the goal of finite being and becoming. Theism erroneously puts this goal at the beginning.

On the point of the (outer) power of S/spirit, it is clear that Scheler’s perspective is strongly divergent not only from the New Age maxim ‘creating your own reality’ but also from the anti-apologetic bedrock ‘creation from nothing’ whereas there seems to be some affinity to Fox and Tillich.

9.3.e. Identity of spirit

Since S/spirit – and by consequence the S/spirit driven person as well - is said to be ‘psycho-physically indifferent’ and not objectifiable, it is not easy to tell where or

99 Scheler, o.c., 62 (63).
100 Scheler, o.c., 63.
101 Scheler, o.c., 62f (63: Scheler rejects: die Lehre von der Selbstmacht der Idee …).
102 Scheler, o.c., 63.
103 Scheler, o.c., 66 (66).
104 Scheler, o.c., 71 (70f).
105 According to Fox, we have to co-create with or even give birth to the Cosmic Christ. And Tillich, similar to Scheler supposed that that the ‘demonic’ is enclosed in the divine (8.2.4.b); that ‘being’ is in need of ‘non-being’ in order to create (8.2.4.a).
what a spiritual person is. What can be said about the identity of a person and its/his/her defining S/spirit? – identity in its dual meaning of ‘sameness’ on the one hand, and ‘quality’, ‘nature’, ‘value’ … on the other.

A spirit-person’s identity in the latter sense can be associated with Scheler’s “ordered structure of acts” executing itself, also designated as a “hierarchical (italics ffo) structure of acts …” in which one act or a certain kind of acts give “direction and guidance in accordance with … a value or idea with which the individual happens to ‘identify himself’”. It seems obvious that the direction and nature of acts closely correlate with the quality or spiritual identity of the acting person. Now Scheler has explicitly mentioned a certain class of (values, ideas and) acts that he considered as in particular belonging to the S/spirit principle, acts like “intuition …, voluntary and emotional acts as kindness, love, remorse, reverence, wonder, bliss, despair and free decision” (9.3.b). A further specification of the identity of typical S/spirit inspired acts is implied in Scheler’s emphasis on “the close connection between Love and Act as essential characteristic of spiritual personhood”. Hammer comments that Scheler based his anthropology unequivocally on Christian-theological grounds, on Gods primordial and all-founding act (der göttliche Urakt), according to which God or “Being itself primarily becomes love and ministry, and only then creating, willing, working”.

Reading this one is inadvertently reminded of the divine Ur-akt of eternal election of the human being in Jesus Christ, as forwarded by Barth (see 7.1.a).

Concerning identity as sameness, Hammer observed that Scheler’s spirit or “person as pure act” is above (enthoben) change in outer time-space existence. In other words: a S/spirit-person is capable of retaining his/her/its leading ideas, values and acts, and thus to maintain his/her/its identity through the developments and changes of normal socio-psycho-physical life. This implies however that ‘identity’ is not the same as immobility or changelessness. Instead, maintaining your spiritual identity often requires the willingness to variate your acts, to either adapt yourself to or distance yourself from certain occurring circumstances (see 10.2.c). Hammer illuminates this by referring to Gods acting ad extra, changing and creating all things new, while

106 See the quote (from Man’s Place, 47) in the main text, above under section d (note 98).

107 Scheler, o.c., 64.

108 Hammer, o.c., 78.


110 Hammer, o.c., 77: Der Akt der göttlichen Liebe ist ... der alles fundierende göttliche Urakt, Gottes “Wesen selbst wird Liebe und Dienen und daraus folgend erst Schaffen, Wollen, Wirken”. But the divine love, Hammer goes on, is also unobjectifiable (ungegenständlich) since Gods acting is infinite and perfect and therefore cannot be measured by any higher means.

111 Hammer, o.c., 83.

112 See also HWdPh, 314, stating that the identity of a person – namely that which remains its being through all changes – lies in the quality and direction of one’s willingness and potential to variate one’s acts. The identity of a person lies “in der qualitativen Richtung des Variierens der Akte (...). Durch diese Identität ist die Person der phänomenalen Zeit seelischer Prozesse und erst recht der objektiven Zeit der Physik enthoben. Sie vollzieht ihre Akte ausserhalb der Zeit in die Zeit hinein”.

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remaining Himself as God (Ur-Person)\textsuperscript{113} totally unchanged. In a similar way – Hammer seems to imply – will the human person retain his identity – both as sameness \textit{and} quality – even though change takes place in the (socio-psycho-physical) relationship with others. The twofold identity of the spirit-person "lies in the quality of the direction of this change as such".\textsuperscript{114}

Clearly, the identity of one’s spiritual personhood as pictured by Scheler cannot be reached by strictly analytic or rational-empirical objectification. Not only other ‘spirits’ but also the ‘spirit’ or person we are ourselves": both should be approached in more intuitive ways. Thus, with respect to ourselves Scheler said that we can “collect ourselves with regard to our being a person: we can concentrate upon it".\textsuperscript{115} As a person, I can pull myself together, as e.g., when I am in a state of great psychic-physical anger about something that has happened. Collecting myself as a person then implies taking distance to the stressful situation, including to my psycho-physical self, and decide what is really essential according to my ‘S/spirit’, that is: to me as the S/spirit carrying person I basically am … and then, to act accordingly.

Identifying S/spirit, the S/spirit of other persons than myself, can never be rationally grasped and objectified. But we can come to “know” their spirit, said Scheler, “only by participating in, or by entering into their free acts”. This can actually happen not by objectification but only through its “very opposite”, namely “in an attitude of emphatic love … in short, by ‘identifying’, as we say, with the will and love of another person and thereby with himself".\textsuperscript{116} Coming from Scheler’s \textit{theonomous} anthropology, it is impossible to identify the human being entirely with or as his/her socio-psycho-somatic concreteness. It is anyhow not possible to pin down a spiritual person’s identity as is demanded in logical-positivist or analytic philosophies. A spirit-person according to Scheler is rather as an all outer reality transcending “mystery”.\textsuperscript{117}

Obviously, there are several points of contact with the sources, both in agreement and in critical opposition. In Part Four, I will further discuss some of them and apply the main points of Scheler’s perspective towards a new formulation of sin.

\textsuperscript{113} See for God as Ur-Person, Hammer, o.c., 65ff.

\textsuperscript{114} Hammer, o.c., 83: \textit{Die Identität liegt hier allein in der qualitativen richtung dieses puren Ander-swerdens selbst} …

\textsuperscript{115} Scheler, o.c., 47.

\textsuperscript{116} Scheler, o.c., 48 (49).

\textsuperscript{117} Hammer, o.c., 85. Remarkably this is, \textit{nolens volens}, also the conclusion of René Woudenberg in his analytic-philosophical study on the human identity: \textit{Het mysterie van de identiteit. Een analytisch-wis-jgerige studie}, Sun: Nijmegen 2000, 121: \textit{Het enige dat ik zie, is dat er zoiets is als de identiteit, in strikte zin, van personen door de tijd. Ik kan niet anders dan dit aanvaarden als een bruit en mysterieus feit.}
PART FOUR: ASSESSMENT, CONCLUSIONS, PERSPECTIVES

Taking the Plantinga formulation as point of departure – sin is a “culpable and personal affront to a personal God” - my aim is to frame a doctrine of ‘sin beyond theism’. This implies a formulation of sin which does not require the theistic adoption of a personal God as precondition for speaking of sin. The advantage of such a formulation is that it can also appeal to believers who reject the notion of a personal Deity, with God as person. In fact, I opt for a reformulation of sin that in principle applies and can speak to anyone, believers as well as those who see themselves as non-believers, post-Christians. Considering this as a gain, I am aware of the fact that gains are seldom won without losses. Both sides will be considered in the final paragraph (§ 11. A reformulation of sin – gains and losses). In advance, I will discuss and explain the preconditions and suppositions on which my reformulation is based (§ 10). In doing so, I will select from the sources those elements that I can use and fuse into the concept of sin beyond a personal God.

As announced in the main introduction, my method is apologetic, which needs some demarcation in relation to the enterprise coined anti-apologeticism (2.1.2.c.ii). A most remarkable aspect of the anti-apologetic endeavor by Thomasius was his intention to defend traditional faith by attacking traditional defenses of faith. Hardly concealing authoritarianism, Thomasius took his point of departure in the strict ontological hierarchy of a literal, supposedly biblical cosmology stating God as omnipotent Creator on top. On this basis, he was unprepared – and within his ontology unable - to make concessions to perspectives that he could not logically combine with his strictly doctrinal foundation. In order to elaborate my own viewpoint, I will take a decidedly apologetic stance, for which I suppose three conditions to be vital.

Firstly, in place of the ‘realist’-theological cosmology of orthodoxy, I take biblical and theological language as thoroughly symbolic, in which I follow Tillich. This enables me to abstract from a rigid literal meaning of religious language, including central symbols like ‘Creator’, ‘son of God’, and last but not least: ‘God’. In this way commensuration with other perspectives and sources, and dialogue with regard to the reality that is represented by these (religious) notions becomes possible, whether theistic or non-theistic.

Secondly, dialogue, which is the basic structure of apologetics, includes making concessions or letting go of what can be counted as secondary and deciding what is essentially implied in the religious symbols of your faith. Therefore, I consider the practice of apologetic theology not to be a necessary evil but a blessing, since it forces the apologist to get to the core of his/her belief, to concentrate on what is really her/his ultimate concern.

Thirdly, with respect to the supposed core of faith, apologetic theology must be clear about its norm, and about what is essential in its own standpoint. I will make this explicit by determining the three normative aspects that should be met in order to identify a phenomenon as sin. In this respect I follow Plantinga’s concept according to its structure. The three structural elements of the sin relationship are: 1. the necessity of divine-human duality or opposition; 2. the necessity of some form of identifiable human personhood. 3. The divine element. The latter is the really theological element concerning God or the divine as the aggrieved party. In contrast to the Plantinga formula, I will argue that God as the aggrieved ‘object’ need not necessarily be taken as
person. Sin can also be described as directed against a divine principle, norm, law, or ‘something’, which I will take as epitomized in the divine Spirit, being present in humans as his or her personal spirit. A vital role in my argumentation will be played by Max Scheler’s metaphysical anthropology of ‘spirit based personhood’, in particular his perspective on spirit as the essence of human being and personhood, implying that ‘person’ is secondary to and stands in service of spirit.\footnote{Scheler: Person is the “centre of action in which spirit appears within a finite mode of being” (9.3.b).}

Applying this insight also theologically, is the challenge of the coming paragraph (§ 10; in particular 10.3).

§ 10. The three structural elements of sin

In this paragraph I will describe the presuppositions and conditions on the basis of which I will elaborate my thesis on sin in the next (§ 11). To do so, I will assess and determine the three elements that form the structure of the sin relationship. These elements are actually the three preconditions for speaking of sin, firstly the element of divine-human distinction or opposition (10.1), secondly, the part of identifiable individual human personhood (10.2), thirdly the religious element concerning the divine object of sin (10.3). I will develop the first two elements largely in critical dialogue with and distinction from the New Age sources Roberts and ACiM, whereas my elaboration of the divine element stands in critical dialogue with traditional Christianity as implicitly represented by Plantinga’s doctrine of sin. Relevant perspectives of Barth, Tillich and Fox will of course be involved in this dialogue.

10.1 The necessity of spiritual opposition: divine-human duality

All things come into being by conflict of opposites as in the case of the bow and the lyre (Heraclitus)

Given the Plantinga doctrine of sin, it rings as a platitude to say that sin presupposes duality or opposition. The point, of course, is what sort of duality we are talking about. What happens to the duality when either anthropology or theology or both undergo changes? What kind of opposition can we imagine, when the human person and/or God become less distinct, less identifiable, and less person-like compared to the point of view in unshaken old-time religion? It appeared in the case of Roberts that there is no evil, nor sinful opposition, when there is no distinguishable human person (6.2.ii Roberts). In ACiM, any form of opposition or separation would as such be evil or sin, if it weren’t for the fact that all such perceptions are illusory (6.2.ii ACiM).

By contrast, it appeared that for Barth divine-human opposition is not as such already sin or in any sense negative, which is quite different from the perspective in ACiM. For Barth, divine-human duality is in first instance a neutral fact, both theologically and ontologically. Or rather a precondition for communion. God did not want to stay alone as God, therefore he chose a companion or partner as His antithesis with the intention that mutual participation would occur, as between a father and his son, a mother and her child. Simply because ‘it takes two to dance the tango’. But this positive election implied as its inevitable counterpart the potential or freedom of humans to react to God’s inviting Yes by saying No (7.1.a). Only when this unintended, collateral possibility is realized, the as such preconditional divine-human distinction becomes sinful antagonism. Although Barth took pains to describe the impossible and
unimaginable absurdity of this option, it nevertheless became a fact. That is to say, it became an inferior fact of only a second-rate, shadowlike ontological standing, for which reason Barth referred to it as “Nothingness” (das Nichtige). Still, in some sense it became a ‘reality’.

If we relate this to Roberts’ second ontological priority of good over evil there is resemblance as well as divergence. For Barth too there is infinite ontological priority of good (what God has chosen) over evil (what humans choose instead). So, he minimized the ontological substance of evil (including sin), but simultaneously maximized its anti-divine quality. Roberts denied sin (as token of evil) both ontologically and qualitatively, by simply identifying evil as ignorance. For her, spiritual ignorance is the basis of our problems since our “only limitations are spiritual ones” (3.2.1.a). Now, we might very well agree with this from a Barthian standpoint, but the question is in what sense spiritual limitation is taken. Strictly speaking, Roberts saw spiritual limitation – or growth – predominantly in quantitative terms, as differences of degree: narrow versus wide, limited versus unlimited, less versus more awareness. Spiritual growth happens through connecting with other units of consciousness into larger entities and more and more extended networks. Extra Sensory Perception (such as clairvoyance, telepathy) is presented as token of growing awareness. But strictly speaking, ESP capacities point to a quantitative ‘more’ - both in means of gaining, and in quantity of the result – rather than to the (spiritual) quality and content of what is gained. If we proceed in the line of thought presented by Roberts/Seth, only unlimited and all-encompassing consciousness is really capable of an overall holistic look on reality, in which nothing is wrong or evil, and everything receives its proper place. Barth however, consciously rejected the idea of a total “harmony of being” (7.2. intro) which would have to include evil and sin. He measured evil and sin, and the content of one’s awareness, not in quantitative but qualitative terms. No matter how broadminded or all-encompassing our take of the ultimate harmony of being may be, evil and sin can never be integrated in it, because of their quality or direction: evil and sin are anti-divine, implying that according to their nature or spirit, they spoil any all-embracing harmony, they attack it and destroy it. Opposing the divine, the evil of sin must stem from a different ‘spirit’ than the Spirit of God.

Thus, an important insight can be gained from Roberts’ statement that our genuine limitations are spiritual ones. When applied to the evil of sin, it means that sin points to opposition that is spiritual, or at least has its origin in the realm of spirit. Based on this assumption, but then diverging from Roberts, and following Barth, we must state that the hamartiological essence of sin is not ignorance, not the limited quantity of one’s spiritual awareness – as if we should be spiritually capable of swallowing anything. Instead, evil and sin concern the quality of our spirit, the direction of its ‘blowing’. The implication is that basically, sin does not proceed from a person’s limitation or narrow view, but primarily from viewing in an off beam direction, following a path going against what is considered as the divine spirit – and which may very well be against one’s own true spirit as well.

In both cases, evil and sin represent a collision or struggle between two spiritual identities, between two spirits of different quality and aim, countering, fighting, and weakening each other. The notions ‘quality’ and direction or ‘aim’ do not suggest a ‘more’ or ‘less’ in quantity, but rather a ‘this’ or ‘that’, they suggest a particular ‘class’ or ‘value’, in contrast to other classes or values. If one goes in one direction, one can-
not go ‘more’ or ‘less’ in the same direction. One can change direction, and decide to
go the opposite way, but it is a matter of either-or. This either-or can be expressed in
religious terms of serving two different Gods (Mt. 6,24) – which is not possible - or in
terms of following two opposing spiritual concerns (see 10.2.c).

Reconnecting this with the Plantinga doctrine, we can say now, in addition to its
structural element of ‘opposition’ (affront) that this opposition is primarily a matter
of spirit. Plantinga’s formula of sin does not explicitly contain the word ‘spirit’, but it
does speak regarding the human sinner of “culpable and personal”. The notion ‘culpable’
can easily be explained in terms of spirit, since it refers to a spiritual feeling and
awareness, resulting from conflicting personal aspirations or spiritual aim. But how
can a spiritual phenomenon like guilt come into being, and come out into the open?
How does spiritual opposition become an intersubjective existential experience? The
most plausible answer is: all that belongs to the realm of ‘spirit’ like ‘spiritual conflict’
- but the same is valid with respect to ‘spiritual synergy’, ‘love’, sympathy and the like
- must have some kind of outer realization, some form of representation or managing
centre in the world of subject-object experience. Only through manifestation, in outer
acts to which one spirit or another has inspired, the concerning spirit can be acknow-
ledged and recognized as extending evil or well-being. In the Plantinga concept of sin
this outer aspect is taken care of through the notion “personal” used with respect to
the sinner. It refers to the responsible, executive person who is either representing and
realizing or betraying his/her personal concern or spirit in outer acts. This brings us to
the human part in the sin relationship, the human person as centre of spiritual action.

10.2 The necessity and relevance of identifiable human person personhood

_Spirit is the essence of personhood, person the minister of spirit_

It appeared with Roberts and in _ACiM_ that ignoring or rejecting definable and
objectifiable personhood is at least helpful to deny, evade, or declare illusory percep-
tions of evil and sin. By blurring personhood, thereby dissolving the supposed human
actor of sin, Roberts and _ACiM_, each in their own way seem to ‘anthropologize away’
the possibility of sin. (6.2.i). Similarly, Barth’s low assessment of the human person
as poorly practicing devotee to Jesus Christ seemed to make autonomously doing a
“work of praise” unlikely or even impossible (7.3.3.a.ii). In answer to this, I assume
that a concept of personhood, describing the reality of actual and distinguishable hu-
man beings – including both one’s potential and one’s limitation - is positively pre-
conditional not only in order to speak of sin or evil, but similarly with respect to doing
what is good. In both respects, there simply must be a definable, and to some extent
objectifiable ‘carrier’ or representative of responsibility and accountability. This is in
line with Scheler defining ‘person’ as the ‘centre of action’ in which ‘spirit’ appears
within the finite mode of being. (9.3.b, nt.84). For S/spirit to appear or work in the
open, there must be a demonstrable person.

This is the truth of the elements “culpable and _personal_” in the Plantinga formula.
Guilt – as well as merit - can only be attributed to a concretely acting, identifiable
human being or person. Plantinga himself did not elaborate on his understanding of
‘person(al)’, neither on the theological-hermeneutical question (9.2.4) that is raised
by his twofold use of “personal” namely with regard to both the human sinner and God. What is needed in order to answer this question is an anthropology describing what is essential about personhood. And then it must be determined whether or to what extent this can be applied to the divine side of the sin relationship as well. With respect to both questions, I will revert to the anthropology by Scheler. In the present section, the focus is on the doer of sin, drawing the demanded picture of human personhood (10.2). The next section is about the Deity in the relationship (10.3). There, I will consider to what extent the anthropological picture of the human spirit-person can also be applied theologically, that is with regard to God or the divine, as the object of sin.

In both sections, the aim of formulating a viable doctrine of sin functions as criterion for the assessment of perspectives offered by the sources. Elements of their view on personhood will be taken into account, but only be adopted on the condition of being compatible with the possibility of sin. Before going on, I will spill some words on the usefulness of Scheler’s view of the spirit-person as some sort of yardstick.

Initially, I expected little more than that Scheler’s perspectives on spirit-oriented-personhood might be helpful in offering some orientation in the midst of the seemingly incommensurable differences prompted by the sources. Gradually, however, Scheler’s ideas proved more than helpful towards a better understanding of the essential shortcoming in some perspectives of the sources. This became clear to me, when I came to realize that his anthropology by closely connecting S/spirit and person, actually describes the human spirit-person as the ‘meeting-place between the human and the divine’. I will elaborate on this below (10.4.a).

In addition to these more intuitive-personal motifs, I will give three more general grounds for my choice of the anthropology of Scheler. These grounds are actually three fields of coherence, of which the first is a structural coherence with the sources. This may ring as a surprise, but despite all the differences, the sources do have one pervasive anthropological distinction in common. They all adopt some form of duality, division or otherness in their picture of human being, implying the distinction of two human selves, or at least two dimensions or stages of the human self: one real, the other more illusory. The one higher, more spiritually knowing, and closer to the divine than the other. Scheler adopted a similar distinction of two realms or aspects in the human being, which will be addressed in the actual discussion below. Scheler, further, presented his perspective on human personhood in scientific coherence with the natural sciences and philosophic anthropology, deliberately taking into account the medical and biological-evolutionary insights of his time (9.3.a). But he was not uncritical, therefore adding what he saw as the spiritual core element of the human being, implying that one is a human person only through the additional principle of spirit. The element of spirit (Geist) as the determining principle, refers, thirdly, to what is Scheler’s coherence with a Christian-theological approach of human personhood in the first phase of his career, while in the final years of his life he moved towards a more general philosophical or metaphysical approach.

The question of Scheler’s relationship (including that of his ideas) to Christianity became an issue when he abandoned the Catholic Church in his final years (1922ff), after more than two decades of intentional membership. In his ‘Catholic’ period he was acclaimed for elabo-
rating and giving expression to the “connection between religion and modern philosophy”. In this period he unequivocally defended traditional theism while refuting pan(en)theism, until and most clearly in *Vom Ewigen im Menschen* (1921). After breaking with the Church, he also estranged rationally from religious concepts and practices - such as covenant, prayer, and the child-Father relationship in faith. Scheler came to see all these religious ingredients as based on “theism” which he now felt obliged to reject “on philosophical grounds”, approvingly referring to Spinoza, Hegel a.o. According to Van Vucht Tijssen, Scheler’s move towards philosophy, and towards a more “secularized metaphysics”, could only be expected from his intellectual motifs, namely to combine and “reconcile rationality with a-rationality”.

I like to question, however, if Scheler’s leaving the Church and abandoning theistic vocabulary made a substantial change to his thinking. Scheler’s basic motif, namely, to observe ‘connection’ (formerly between “religion and philosophy”, now between “rationality and a-rationality”) – largely remained what is was. Only now he apparently derived “spirit” no longer from what he formerly called ‘God’ but from “the ultimate Ground of Being” (9.3.b; nt. 84). According to Van Vucht Tijssen this marks a significant change, since Scheler’s earlier reference to ‘God’ was in her eyes like invoking a “*deus ex machina*” – which of course is hard to swallow for most secular philosophers. I agree that the expression “ultimate Ground of Being” is not verbally the same as the word “*deus*”, and certainly rings more ‘secular’. But seen from an unadulterated natural-scientific or analytic-positivistic standpoint, both expressions contain an equal grade of “*ex machina*”, stemming namely from one and the very same machinery of metaphysical imagination.

Apart from the general grounds given above, the relevance of Scheler’s anthropology materializes in its three main aspects that I can use for the final assessment of the perspectives on personhood we have met in the sources. The three main aspects of the human being according to Scheler (see 9.3) are, firstly, our psycho-physical existence which includes our subject-object oriented, rational consciousness (10.2.a. The outer psycho-physical person or ego). The second and most essential element of human being is our having spirit (10.2.b. The human spirit-person) seen as principally transcending the first aspect. The third aspect of being a spirit-bearing person is that spirit, including my own spirit, comes out into the open and becomes manifest in outer existence through my actuality or acting (*Aktualität*). This is the place where sin occurs, namely, when my true spirit and my acting do not match but contradict each other (10.2.c. Personal spirit, actuality and the genesis of sin).

10.2.a The outer psycho-physical person or ego.

In the intentionally Christian period of his career, Scheler derived the essence of human personhood – which is having S/spirit - from above, from God leading to a
theonomous doctrine of man (9.3). After his conversion away from the Church, in his final phase of *Man’s place in nature*, he designed his picture of human being from below, that is by comparing the human person with other living organisms varying from plants to anthropoid apes. It is with them that we share our psycho-physical existence. This means that our psycho-physically equipped existence as such, even including our rationality, is not yet what defines us as humans, it does not yet separate us essentially from non-human organisms. I take this psycho-physical aspect as largely in agreement with the outer ego – i.e. our ego dominated physical existence - we met with Roberts and *ACiM*. Clearly, they went much further in their low assessment if not marginalization of the outer aspect. For *ACiM*, our physical existence, including its psycho-rational ego consciousness based on the outer senses, is altogether illusory. And for Roberts, my truly spiritual self will be better off, that is, more powerfully creative and infinitely brighter in consciousness, once it has developed and ascended beyond the incarnational cycle. In Scheler’s view, by contrast, our embodied existence, though not uniquely human, is indispensably part of who we are, and of the fact that we are. The psycho-physical creature we outwardly are, is so to speak the hardware or infrastructure of our being alive, the necessary precondition for becoming, being and acting as a possibly spirited person. The psycho-physical aspect of human being comes close to the ‘being we have in ourselves’ (Barth, 7.1.c), the not yet personal or an-hypostatic human nature which is the outer human being apart from the religious dimension. It is like autonomous reason separated from its spiritual depth (cf. Tillich, 9.1.b.ii). In biblical-religious terms it is the prophet without his calling, in Christological terms: Jesus without Christ.

The added value of Scheler’s perspective on this point is that it takes a nuanced course. Our outer embodied ego appearance is clearly relativized, but without disconnecting it from the genuine person we are, certainly not to the extent of disqualification of body and ego as happens in the systems of Roberts and *ACiM*, and to some extent also with Barth. Actually, like all living beings, we cannot do a thing without our body and outer ego, we depend on their physical powers and mental energies in all of our functions and faculties, including rationality. But then, the question is: is there a principle according to which the finite psycho-physical entity I already am, can be directed? If there is, then - as psycho-physical ego – I might rise to actively let myself be directed. I might intentionally try to foster and serve the extension and realization of this principle in and through consciously chosen behavior and acts. For the role and office of such ‘principle’, says Scheler, have animals a complex of drives and instincts according to which they act. But for animals there is no (or hardly any) distance between drives and acts. By contrast, humans have received an additional or “new principle” called spirit, of which the centre of action within finite existence is:

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7 Van Vucht Tijssen, *Uit de ban van de rede*, 50.
8 That is to say: as far as outer existence is not spiritually driven by love it is illusory. On the other hand, I am not sure whether and in what way outer existence, in so far it is spiritually enchanted and branded by love, can be considered as ‘real’ from the *ACiM* standpoint. Because within the *ACiM* ontology, it is by no means clear what outer existence - even when drenched in spiritual love – does or can actually add to the eternal, unchangeable spiritual reality of the Sonship.
9 In Christological term, the psycho-physical part refers to ‘Jesus’ apart from the incarnated divine Logos or ‘Son of God’.
10 Not with respect to the body as such, but with respect to the being we have in ourselves, as sinful or slothful beings (7.1.c).
the rational, psycho-physical ‘person’ I am. Spirit is called “new” by Scheler because it does not stem from the natural evolution of life but from elsewhere, namely from God, or (after distancing himself from theism) from the “ground of being” (9.3.b).

10.2.b THE HUMAN SPIRIT-PERSON

What discriminates me as human principally from a cat or a crow, according to Scheler, is my being endowed with ‘spirit’ (Geist) concentrated in and represented by a centre called person. Having spirit implies two dialectic polarities determining the human potential: namely the polarity between identification and taking distance (i); and between inner autonomy and outer dependency (ii).

(i) As spirit carrying persons and in contrast to non-human creatures, we have a two-sided potential, on the one hand of identification, on the other of taking distance. In fact, Scheler presented the first side largely as the material content of spirit implying the drive towards understanding, identifying with life at large and with other creatures through intuition and voluntary emotional acts like affection, goodness, love.11 Now, Scheler did not deny that animals can have a capacity for similar phenomena, but the difference is that they lack the opposing capacity.12

The opposite of identification, and also its underlying basis, is the potential of taking distance, not only to the opposing world, and to others, but also and in particular to ourselves, including our ego interests. Spirit carrying persons, according to Scheler, are capable of transcending all psycho-physical life in self and others. They have the ability of “self-consciousness” and “strict objectivity”, not in the least with respect to their own being and doing. This implies that spirit carrying persons are potentially “open to the world” (9.3.c). They can variate their acts according to their spiritual identity, thus answering to their spirit’s call by acting accordingly. But they can also ignore it and remove themselves from their original spirit in their acting. Precisely here lies the point where sin begins. I will exemplify this in the next section (10.2.c).

(ii) The other polarity inherent to spirit is between the inner autonomy of spirit going along with outer dependency. As spiritual person, humans are free and independent in the sense that their “spirit is autonomous in its being and laws” (9.3.d). Spiritual freedom and autonomy converge with the priority of the mind/spirit (Roberts, ACiM), and also with the biblical-Christian view on the Spirit of God, who like “the wind blows wherever it pleases” (Jh. 3,8). Accordingly, the spirit in humans has something unconditional.

But autonomy is not the same as creative omnipotence. Regarding the creative potency of spirit according to Scheler, there is no convergence at all with Roberts and ACiM, both making spirit absolute and granting it unlimited creative potency. Instead, Scheler explicitly denied that spirit has “original creative power” of its own (9.2.d). With both Roberts and in ACiM, the consequence of their radical and exclusive focus

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11 According to Scheler, the activity of spirit is broader than reason (Ideen denken). Spirit includes the intuition of essences (Anschauungen von Urphänomenen oder Wesen gehalten), as well as intentional acts like “kindness, love, remorse, reverence, wonder, bliss, despair and free decision” (9.3.b). I note that all these acts Scheler ascribed to ‘spirit’ presuppose a certain measure of empathy or identification, be it with values or essences, with other creatures (kindness, love, remorse) or with the mysteries of life (intuition, wonder, bliss, despair); see: Man’s Place, 36 (38).

12 Man’s Place, 34 (37): Scheler admits that animals too have affects and show acts of “generosity, help, reconciliation, friendship”. But animals lack “the capacity to choose between values as such – e.g. … to prefer the useful to the pleasant as a value in itself independent of the concrete material goods and the accompanying disposition”.

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on spirit is that they actually disconnect spirit from outer existence. In both systems, the real person (inner self, soul, spirit) becomes realized not in outer reality, or in outer acts but exclusively in spiritual evolution and/or in creative imagination. What they identify as the genuine spiritual person does not enter subject-object existence but rather evades it. A miracle in ACiM does not change outer physical reality but helps to escape towards a different mind-set. With Roberts too, the true dimension of my genuine spiritual self is not in the outer world. Instead, my real self is placed beyond my psycho-physical ego existence. And in its own spiritual realm of creative imagination and endless evolving, my spirit-self is believed to be magnificently omnipotent.

The critical divergence from Roberts and ACiM becomes apparent in Scheler’s view that with our spirit, though free and autonomous, we cannot do a thing without our embodied existence. Actually, Scheler stated that the psycho-physically generated “drive” or “vital impulse” belongs to the Ground of Being “as intimately as the spiritual principle itself” (9.3.d). The implication is that as spiritual person I am co-dependent on – or interdependent with – my psycho-physical system, my bodily appearance. With this view, Scheler stood critically opposed to those forms of metaphysics, including parts of traditional Christian theology, that grant self-sufficient autonomy and executive creative power to the realm of spirit. The criticism at stake here is not only opposing the New Age slogan “creating your own reality” but is also countering its anti-apologetic opposite “creation from nothing”. Both appear to grant autonomous omnipotence to the realm of spirit, whether represented by a human person or by the Creator God himself.

The problem with the idea of ex nihilo creation is that it denies any creative dependence on outer bodies, drives, or energies, even implying creation of all things without primal matter. In this way the doctrine suggests ontological monism which Christianity has always rejected. Now, this contradiction stands as long as “creation from nothing” is meant as an ontological concept but disappears when taken as a theological symbol. In the latter sense, it is no longer intended to describe, so to speak, the process of creation, or how reality came into being without prime matter, but rather to represent the absolute confidence of the believer’s faith in God. Such ultimate trust does not require the monistic (and basically shy) belief that ontologically there may be nothing beyond or besides God. One need not be a monist, neither ontologically, nor theoretically to have basic trust in God as the personalized ground of one’s being, in the divine Spirit, or in Jesus Christ. The example of ACiM shows that even radical non-dual monism does not preclude anxious uncertainty and doubt.

By contrast, the esoteric notion creating your own reality is meant as an ontological concept. It is intended to describe how and what reality is, implying that ‘what is genuinely real’ is never a ‘strange-fellow’ intruding from outside, or standing opposite

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13 Scheler, Man’s place in nature, 63; against Platonism, Christianity: 9.3.d; against Descartes: 9.3.intro. On the other hand, Scheler also criticized physical and biological naturalists for taking spirit as entirely determined. They ignored the truth discussed above (under i) that Spirit, though depending on the outer person for acting, is simultaneously “autonomous in its being and laws”.

14 As e.g., in the Symbolum Apostolicum (Creed of the Apostles): credo in … carnis resurrectionem. Assumedly, this phrase in the Apostolic Confession was originally meant to refute strains of gnostic dualism. According to its content, however, it is equally crippling to spiritual monism.

15 “Note I Cor.8,5f: For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.
to your true self. Reality is not something ‘out there’ but ‘in here’, proceeding from your own spiritual creativity, seated in your genuine inner self. ‘Creating your own reality’ claims that reality is the product of your own imagination, just as traditionalists suppose that the creation of “heaven and earth” is from nothing but the moving Spirit of God.

Now, since neither human nor divine spirit are that almighty or omnipotent, according to Scheler, the distance from his perspective to Roberts and ACiM and to the anti-apologetic standpoint seems to be equally unbridgeable. This is due to the opposing ontological conceptions of (non-dual) monism (ACiM, Roberts) versus what I would call Scheler’s ‘non-antagonistic dualism’ or ‘holistic pluralism’, which is also leading in the perspectives of Fox and Tillich (for Barth, see 9.1.a.i). The dissatisfying lacuna of all consequent forms of ontological monism - be it monistic spiritualism or materialism - is that they fail to explain those phenomena that on the one hand, lie beyond their declared area of reality – and are therefore designated as unreal, illusory, or product of ignorance – while, on the other hand, these very same phenomena are experienced as obviously real (at least to some extent) by those adopting a different ontology. In order to evade such lacuna, I follow Scheler (against Roberts/ACiM, but largely in line with Fox/Tillich) to the extent that a spirit carrying being or human person does not exist, i.e. cannot act or do a thing without an embodied ego. Someone’s outer psycho-physical existence is the necessary substructure for spirit to enter, to work upon, and to work through, to the effect that a spiritual or human person occurs. Such spirit carrying person does realize and actualize his/her spirit and being, not in a world of spiritual bliss and inner miracles, but through the execution of acts in outer existence. This brings us to the locus where sin can occur.

10.2.c PERSONAL SPIRIT, ACTUALITY AND THE GENESIS OF SIN

Whereas spirit finds itself a finite centre in an embodied ego (the latter acting as moderator, possibly intensifying the spirit’s energy or blowing it out), spirit itself, according to Scheler, is not objectifiable as such or in se. S/spirit’s being and identity, I/its quality and direction find expression and appear in outer existence only through intentional activity and acts (9.3.d). This clearly moves away from the ontology of Roberts and ACiM and draws towards Fox acclaiming the indwelling Cosmic Christ to unchain various paths of creativity and transformation for us to enter upon. Animals and trees too manifest themselves as who or what they are through (psycho-)physically or instinctually determined acts or growth. But S/spirit carrying humans can take distance to themselves, their drives, and their acts in self-consciousness and self-objectivity (10.2.b). This spiritual and typically human potential, however, is ambiguous in the sense that it can take two courses. Taking distance to oneself can lead to either self-estrangement or self-recovery, to either maintaining or letting go of yourself. It is in this context that sin can take place.

At this point an example may supply for some illumination. Therefore, I propose to imagine an average human being, by no means extraordinary, but calmly inspired by ‘spirit’ - or, expressed in other but equivalent images: touched by a word of direction by Jesus Christ (Barth), indwelled by Cosmic Christ (Fox), or moved by something unconditional (Tillich). In addition, I assume that this essential ‘spirit’ of my

16 Actually, what I intend to describe as a person’s truest ‘spirit’, comes close to what Tillich designated
exemplary individual defines the person he basically is and comes to the surface voluntarily when he is feeling safe and at home. This person’s original spirit, including all that he treasures, believes in, and stands for, is most likely to appear and act within the relatively small and safe circle of private life, of family and friends, where he feels at home and secure. It is in this more or less sheltered domain that he really cares, is naturally prepared to do anything what is necessary to protect, promote and sponsor the wellbeing of his dear ones, all those that belong to his personal, inner circle.17

The question is, what happens to the responsible ‘spirit’ or to the caring person our family-man is, when he goes out to work? This is the point where our spirit’s ability of self-awareness and self-objectivity comes in; and more basically, his/her/its18 ability of taking distance: to him/her/iself, to the psycho-physical spirit-person one is. This ‘taking distance’ or moving away from oneself can happen unknowingly or intentionally, deliberately or under pressure.

Estrangement occurs when in professional or public life he leaves (and even may be ordered to leave) his spiritual personality at home, particularly when he is at work. The rules of his job and function, the targets to be pursued in the real world of society, corporate industry, and administration may require that in the execution of his work he is expected to act against or even deny the very norms and standards of responsibility that are his most serious concern in private life at home. Hiding behind his superiors, he simply plays the game according to the rules, no matter what the collateral damage may be for others that are directly or indirectly involved. Instead of acting from integrated concern and with responsible caretaking, which are the spiritual pillars of his personality in private, he now lets himself be guided by rules of profit, growth, and corporate interest. Possibly disastrous more distant or longer-term consequences of his actual work are consciously neglected or conveniently overlooked. When out in the working world, he may distance himself far away from the caring spirit and person he is at home.

What I have now pictured in terms of estrangement, can and must also be described in terms of partial indifference or laziness, personal easiness and sloth. Estrangement is not only a non-personal self-moving process, but no less a matter of personal choice and responsibility. As such it comes close to what Fox designated as acedia, “I can’tism” or the refusal to be creative (5.2.d; 5.3.b). Ignoring your spirit, forgetting or neglecting your true being may also remind us of Barth’s elaborations of sloth (7.2.2.a), especially what he described as ‘dissipation, indiscipline with respect to one self’ (7.2.2.a.iii).19 This combination of ‘estrangement and sloth’ in relation to one’s spirit – which is also ‘estrangement through sloth’ – can be applied to anyone: when earning my income, I follow and serve a spirit that may be quite foreign to my own true spirit, the person I was at home. Depending from the situation, I may rep-

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17 Clearly, we can easily imagine less idyllic examples of sad little tyrants in private homes, but the point I want to make is that the original personality of our exemplary man, his unprompted spirit so to speak, is most likely to appear when he is in peace, rather than in a situation of being hunted by a pack of wolves.

18 The word for spirit can be either masculine or feminine in Hebrew (rūach), neutral in Greek (pneuma) or masculine in Latin (spiritus).

19 Clearly, Barth related the sin of sloth (e.g. one’s dissipation or indiscipline with respect to one self) to our true human self in Christ, whereas I relate it to the true ‘spirit’ that is the personal essence in ourselves.
resent or follow two spirits that are mutually opposed: the one with serious concern for my (direct) neighbours (friends, kin), the other indifferent, careless and denying genuine responsibility for more remote (indirect) neighbours. In fact, I act and behave not as one, but as two different persons, playing two incompatible roles, serving two irreconcilable spirits.

Until now, I have described one side of the spiritual capacity of taking distance, namely in its danger of moving away from one’s original self, partly taking place under pressure, partly through personal indolence, sloth or lack of courage. However, in case of critical self-objectification, taking distance may also imply the potential of spiritual recovery and transformation in a more integrated sense. This other side of taking distance to oneself includes the potential of self-criticism, striving for self-return. It implies the attempt to rediscover and decide for one’s more original spirit, reconnecting with one’s authentic self. As spirit carrying persons, we can surpass ourselves and our world, our body and psyche, since the spirit from which we act proceeds from outside the world, from a locus either in God or in the highest Ground of Being itself (9.3.c). Unlike non-human beings, this can make us free from our direct drives and environment, make us open to the world, and grant us the potential to change or even oppose. An example might be the so-called ‘whistle-blower’.

So far, it is not yet necessary to speak of sin, since it is still open whether denying my own real spirit-person is also denying the divine Spirit or God. That depends on the relationship between my personal spirit and the S/spirit of God or of the ultimate Ground of Being. To this divine Spirit, I will now turn, and to Its alleged personhood.

10.3 The object of sin: divine Spirit or personal God

In the Plantinga formula of sin (“culpable and personal affront to a personal God”) it is taken for granted that the word ‘personal’ can be used with regard to both the human sinner and the aggrieved God. Scheler leads us to a notion of personhood which is predominantly ‘spirit’ oriented. According to him, the principle ‘spirit’ is the essence of being a human person, implying that ‘being spiritual’ is more basic a thing to say of humans than ‘being a person’. From here the more religious question prompts itself, namely, what is the more basic thing to say theologically: that we see God as Spirit? Or that we see God as Person? Now, with respect to the Plantinga formulation the question whether or not, and to what extent, the notion ‘person(al)’ can be applied with regard to both God and humans; and whether or not divine and human personhood are anyhow commensurable concepts (9.2.4) depends on the question whether correlation in two directions is possible. If one wants to maintain Plantinga’s double use of “personal”, it is necessary to show, on the one hand that a well-chosen anthropological concept of personhood can be symbolically applied to God; on the other hand, that a biblical and theologically based concept of divine personhood can theonomously be applied to human personality. On the basis of Scheler’s anthropology of spirit-based-personhood, I will argue that “spirit” can help to bridge the divine-human void more adequately than the notion “personal” is meant to do in the Plantinga formula. In line with Scheler, I will argue that the divine-human connection
or relationship need not necessarily be described in terms of person and is actually more fundamentally described in terms of ‘spirit’.

The validity of this argument depends on the question whether, how, or to what extent Scheler’s notion of spirit-based personhood can also be applied to God. In order to answer this question, I will determine and assess whether and how the three main (anthropological) aspects, each in particular, apply to the spiritual reality called God or divine Spirit. Each of the three main aspects or characteristics of ‘spirit’ as presented in relation to human personhood, should receive a satisfying explanation when used with respect to divine Spirit: first, the psycho-physical aspect (a) which is indispensable for the human spirit, whereas divine Spirit has no physical body or ego; second, the ‘spirit’s radical quality or potential of taking distance including self-transcendence or self-objectivity (b); third, the aspect of actuality (c).

10.3.a THE PSYCHO-PHYSICAL ASPECT: GOD HAS NO BODY OR EGO OF HIS OWN

An apparent divergence between divine and human being is the psycho-physical aspect or ego. For the human being, this outer aspect is a necessary precondition in order to be and act. But when with the Belgic Confession we believe and confess “that there is a single and simple spiritual being, whom we call God”, also believed to be “invisible and infinite”20, we not only state that God is spirit but simultaneously take for granted that God is without physical existence. God or divine spirit has no physical body of himself. But does God or divine spirit have a psychic centre or ego? It may ring a bit strange to ask this, but it is part of the question whether and how God being spirit (Jh. 4,24) can be seen as person. Accompanying questions are: can divine Spirit be addressed as through prayer? Can God as spirit be experienced as speaking or acting in the outer world? – since as “spiritual being” he has no body, no psycho-physical ego of his own, that exists as his unique personal centre.

In case of humans, one’s outer psycho-physical existence is indispensably part of one’s personhood, in such a way that our body-mind appearance is preconditional. In other words, our psycho-physical ego is the necessary medium or tool for our spirit to exist and act. The ego itself or as such is not the essence of human personhood - which is the human spirit. What is vital about the ego is its function as a tool not the specific form of the tool. A human spirit cannot dispense with its psycho-physical substrate since ‘all that belongs to spirit’ must have some form of outer representation and manifestation in the world of subject-object experience in order to act and realize itself (10.1). How else could anything spiritual ever be recognized as something real, active and powerful if not through actualization and appearance one way or the other? Clearly, this also counts for the “spiritual being we call God”. The Eternal One too, not ontologically for His being Spirit in se, but for His opera ad extra, cannot dispense with outer, non-spirit forms of representation in order to act and express Himself in the world. But how can he and does he as purely spiritual being? Like a human spirit, the Deity as pure and “simple spiritual being” needs embodiment too. The question is: how? Whereas human spirit-persons, in order to represent themselves, have only one physically embodied ego of their own, I see at least three objectifiable forms of embodiment or outer manifestation that actually represent God’s Spirit in more or less personal form in outer existence, These are: representation through symbols (i),

20 The Belgic Confession, art. 1.
through inspired human agents (ii), and through the incarnation of Christ in Jesus (iii)\textsuperscript{21}.

The first form of divine presence through symbolism (i) is widespread and probably the oldest in the history of religions. As Elijah experienced at Horeb, symbols derived from nature can vary from storm, earthquake and fire – some ancient epiphanies of divine power – until the highest symbol for God derived from human personhood, namely God addressing you as person, whispering to the human heart in a gentle breeze of silence (I Kings 19, 12). Actually, becoming aware of God through the whisper of silence marks the transition from non-personal symbols borrowed from nature to the main symbol of divine reality, God as person (Creator, Lord, Father etc.), which is derived from human self-experience. The personal address and new calling that came to Elijah leads us to the next form of self-manifestation of divine Spirit.

The second form of actual divine presence is represented by human agents that are chosen and inspired (ii). In such cases, something divine, designated by different names (divine Word, Cosmic Christ, \textit{directio Christi} or \textit{Weisung des Sohnes}, something unconditional, ‘spirit’) enters quietly or breaks through forcefully into human reality. It may come step by step, gradually growing stronger as in Moses and Samuel, but it can also fade away again, getting exhausted as in Aaron and Saul; it may be spontaneous as in Rachab, natural and original as in Ruth, solid as Boaz, or mutable as in Jonah; explosive as with Samson, inventive as in Gideon, relentless as Deborah and Judith, unbending and persistent as with Rizpa. Though not one of them represents the fullness of God in its entirety, all humans receive and carry in themselves some part of divine spirit, and then, one way or the other, represent their part of spirit through their acting, as was already the hope of Joël and the conviction of St. Peter at Pentecost (Acts 2, 17). Rather than having one psycho-physical body of his own, the divine Spirit has many potential bodies and ego’s for expression. God as Spirit enters and makes use of an infinite number of human persons in order to act.

But searching for the most pronounced realization of divinity in outer reality, for the most integrated wholeness and complete combination of divine word, spirit, and personality Christians have always referred to the incarnation (iii), that is to Jesus who is the Christ, proclaiming that in Jesus “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Colossians 2, 9). In the midst of time, in Jesus as the carrier of the Word, divinity has come out into the open, ultimately and eschatologically realizing him/her/it-self in the midst of human existence.

Conclusion: in order to act and present itself in the world, divine Spirit has not one body, ego or person of its own, but it uses infinite forms for its \textit{re-presentation}. According to Christian belief, it does so most clearly through one person in particular (Jesus of Nazareth); then also through countless spirit-carrying human persons such as ourselves; and most generally through infinite possible forms of symbolization, of which the personal symbol ‘God’ is the most universal. Taken together, these are infinite forms functioning as tools through which divine Spirit can address us or be addressed by us.

\textsuperscript{21} These three forms are in line with the second article of \textit{The Belgic Confession}, stating that God can be known through the book of nature and through his holy and divine Word. The book of nature actually implies the first two of my representations: namely Gods work through the universe (i. symbols of nature) and through creatures (ii. inspired humans) whereas the divine Word is particularly outspoken through the incarnation in Jesus (iii).
10.3.b Taking distance — self transcendence

In Scheler’s anthropology, the spirit of a human person not only depends on his/her psycho-physical ego as its executive centre but transcends it as well (Leibüber-habenheit or psycho-physical indifference). Transcendence implies the potential of taking distance to the surrounding world and to oneself in “strict objectivity” and “self-consciousness” (9.3.c). In particular regarding oneself, the ability of taking distance is vital for a spirit driven person, both in view of what one is, and of what one can become. Taking distance to oneself in self-objectification is preconditional not only for considering one’s own true spirit or identity but also, and in relation to this, to critically assess one’s own actuality. Clearly the potential of taking distance to oneself (self-objectivation) which marks the presence of S/spirit is prerequisite if one is consciously to decide for change or transformation: either of self or of the world. Only through this spiritual potential one is free not only to the world but also to one’s psycho-physical self, one’s ego, including its interests.

Although in human existence this double freedom may be as difficult as it is rare, in the divine life it belongs to the core virtues theologically ascribed to God as Spirit. In many ways Christian theology has emphasized divine freedom. God or divine Spirit is portrayed as not only transcending the world and standing free towards it, but also and even as standing in dialectic opposition to himself. Divine freedom, in the first place towards Himself belongs to the spiritual essence of the one-God-three-persons teaching of Trinity (i). Secondly, freedom towards creation, and in particular to humankind, appears in the original election-creation of the human being as both his partner and opposite, as advocated by Barth (ii). Finally, God’s freedom is in particular expressed in the Christian core idea of divine forgiveness or acceptance, described by Tillich as the protestant principle (iii). I will briefly expound on these phenomena of the Spirit’s freedom.

Without going extensively into trinitarian theology (i), I note that Trinity as such, as idea implies no monologue but dialogue, or even tri-logy, which was taken serious already in the so called prosopographic exegesis (9.2.1). God taking self-distance appears in the Song of Creation, when God says to his other self: “Let us make mankind in our image and likeness” (Gen. 1, 26). Actually, this verse not only reveals inner-trinitarian self-distance but in addition shows that God wished to have human beings as his antithesis and simultaneously as candidates for participation.

With this choice for creating human opponents (ii), God not only opened the possibilities of sin or intentional cooperation, but also organized so to speak human feedback and even critical protest and contradiction against Himself, as portrayed in particular in the figure of Job.22 Or what to think of Moses at mount Horeb?!23

The third and possibly most significant proof of divine freedom and self-transcendence is forgiveness (iii), which is part of the bedrock of Christianity. It concerns the

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22 See in particular the biblical sidewalks on Job by Barth in Church Dogmatics IV/3, §70, … (KD IV/3, 443ff, esp. 468). According to Barth, Job protested in the name of the God he knew, against the God that remained unknown to him. Both remain in their very own appropriate “freedom” towards the other.

23 See Exodus 32: 11-14: At the time Aaron surrendered to the voice of the people prostrating themselves to a God of their own gold, Moses, uphill, had to prevent God from losing Himself. Moses managed to keep God on track through passionate contradiction, bringing “the Lord to repent of the evil which He said He would do to his people”.

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potential and willingness of the One who “removed our transgressions from us, as far as the east is from the west” (Ps.103,12). The symbolic use of the notion ‘distance’ is hardly a coincidence since the core element in many perspectives on forgiveness is the potential to take distance. Forgiveness presupposes taking distance to the wrongdoer in strict objectification. It implies making distance between his misdeeds and the totality of him as person, including the totality of his acts. Moreover, in order to forgive I must take distance to myself in self-consciousness and self-objectivation. In some sense, I must let go of the part of me that is hurt, which shows that forgiveness is close to the summit of self-transcendence whether granted by humans or by God. With the act of forgiveness, we are dealing already with the aspect of actuality (c), which is about personal acting and doing through which spirit is realized in outer existence. The question is: how can and does divine Spirit come to awareness? How does It act in the outer world, in such a way that we can recognize It?

10.3.c ACTUALITY: DIVINE POTENTIAL AND IDENTITY

As point of departure, I take for granted that, like spirit in human persons, divine Spirit too appears as the One It really is, and can be experienced as such: through Its acts and in Its working (Aktualität). The correctness or at least plausibility of this formal assumption correlates with the more material question about the content of acts supposedly generated by divine Spirit. What is the essential quality, the most typically-divine nature or character of the workings of Holy Spirit? Actually, this question contains two elements of divine Spirit that are closely connected and interrelated, namely divine Spirit’s identity and divine Spirit’s potential (power). Both identity and potential merge together in the divine essence: the really divine nature or quality of the Holy Spirit, revealing Itself and Its content through acts.

For a first tentative and general indication of typically divine, spiritual acts, I refer to the “class of voluntary and emotional acts” mentioned by Scheler, like kindness, love, remorse, reverence, wonder, bliss, despair, free decision (10.2.b.i). More specifically, in his ecclesial period, Scheler emphasized the connection between spiritual acts and love which he based on theological grounds, on the divine “primal act” (der göttliche Urakt) through which “Being itself primarily becomes love and ministry” (9.3.e; nt.110). So far, nothing new. That God, the divine Spirit is primarily involved in acts that have their ultimate basis in love (even in case of God’s wrath) will hardly come as a surprise. But what is ‘love’? How far can love go? What kind and measure of power can love employ? As with most high standing virtues, the point with love is that it may flourish spontaneously in a situation of peace but that its essential quality and ultimate power come to the surface in particular when tested, e.g., when remaining unanswered, neglected or even countered. Only then, love will show and can show and even has to show its real face: its real identity and potential. Quite the same is valid with regard to God and divine Spirit: What can God as Spirit do, particularly in his love and goodness when his inspiration and drive remain unanswered, when the divine Word receives no affirmation, his wisdom is trampled, his love neglected; in one word: when the Spirit of God’s eternal election is frustrated and thwarted by the very ones who are chosen and called to be Its allies? At this point we must ask whether and how the anthropological polarity of spirit discussed above (10.2.b.ii: inner autonomy - outer dependency), also applies to God or the divine Spirit.

Actually, this question directs our attention to the longstanding theodicee-problem
of divine potential and power as possibly conflicting with divine justice and love. Most often, this problem is approached from the standpoint of (innocent) human suffering. But now we come to it from a different angle, namely from the situation of human sin and rejection. Asking for genuinely divine identity and power is asking for the divine reaction to our No. Does divine Spirit then tend to storm and thunder? Or to stillness and waiting? The latter option concerns the idea of (self-) limitation of divine power and potential. This idea was intensely presented and radicalized during the second World War by Bonhoeffer in his *Letters and Papers from prison*. Bonhoeffer let go of God’s power in favour of his love, implying that God has no power to prevent suffering, but that his love appears as his being with us in suffering. The issue was intensely debated in the post-war half of the last century, at all levels of religious discussion among lay-Christians, as well as in homiletic, pastoral, and systematic theology. In the Netherlands, a mediating position was presented by (i.) Hendrikus Berkhof (1914-1995) in the early 1970s. He described divine power as *defenseless Superior Power* (*Weerloze overmacht*). This formulation was changed with a subtle alteration by (ii.) F.O. van Gennep (1926-1990), turning the form as it were upside down: *mighty or powerful defencelessness* (*machtige weerloosheid*).

### 10.3.c.i Berkhof and Bonhoeffer

Berkhof approached the question of divine potential from the situation of human sin, that is, from the encounter between God and the human being, in which “God wants to give himself … as holy love” while we as the intended partners refuse this encounter. If God then still wants to encounter us, he cannot but “manifest himself in another way …” which actually comes down to a conflict in God, constantly alternating “between his grace and his justice, between his wrath and his love (125 (131f)).” What is most conspicuous in this inner divine conflict is not God’s potential or power but his “defencelessness” (134 (142)). Our rejection of his love – said Berkhof - causes a drastic “surrender” on his side, implying that “a definite limit has been put to the power of God” (135 (142f)). God’s defencelessness in the Old Testament with Israel is perhaps best illustrated with the parable of the Lord’s vineyard (Isaiah 5), and most dramatically in the prophet Hosea’s love for his persistently unfaithful wife Gomer. The obvious and ultimate Christian symbol of divine defencelessness is of course the cross at Calvary on which divine defencelessness became actual and was carried by Jesus. Still, with Pentecost, the situation did not change, as Berkhof

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24 *Letters and Papers from Prison*: “God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us. … The Bible directs man to God’s powerlessness and suffering; only the suffering God can help ….”


26 Van Gennep, *De terugkeer van de verloren vader*. The book contains the insights collected by its author over more than two decades. Van Gennep designated his book as an “essay”, as a personal attempt to contribute to the ongoing process of opinion-forming. Unfortunately, Van Gennep died within a year after publication which may account for the relatively small attention his contribution did receive.

27 The numbers in the text refer to *Christian Faith*, 125 (131f) and to the Dutch original: *Christelijk Geloof*.

28 The substance of Berkhof’s sensitive observation and definition are similar to and recur in Ricoeur’s idea of the “*non-violence du témoignage*” and the “*puissance impuissante*” of the Word, cf.: Jansen, *Talen naar God*, 335.
observed, since the Holy Spirit is “resisted and grieved” no less than were Jesus and the ancient prophets (135 (143)).

In building his case Berkhof seems to have hesitated between interpreting defencelessness radically as an ontological reality or as a benevolent temporary strategy (135 (142f)). But considering Bonhoeffer’s radical option, Berkhof stepped back: the word of God’s defencelessness “cannot be the final word, though it can be a first. It can provide an adjective, but not a noun” (137f (145)).

Berkhof then explained that defencelessness cannot result from ontological powerlessness. To the contrary: what he called defencelessness should be seen as “the expression of God’s superiority. He can yield because he knows that he will win” (138 (145f)). Trying to evade the extremes of both impotence and omnipotence, Berkhof maintained that “we cannot do with less than the term ‘superior power’”, implying that we believe in God as “defenseless superior power” (weerloze overmacht) (139 (146f)).

I conclude that Berkhof, although he recognized the “unnecessary acquiescence, rebelliousness, doubt, and unbelief” caused by the sternly doctrinal emphasis on the omnipotence of God, nevertheless wanted to maintain power and potency as indelible or ontological part of God. By taking ‘defencelessness’ as an adjective, he turned it from essence into a temporary attitude or strategy. God’s powerlessness, according to Berkhof, is “a gracious unwillingness to be almighty without us and against us”, but one day in his fellowship with us, God will prove to be the almighty one which He can do “only because he is already in himself and from eternity the almighty”. For this reason, Berkhof took distance to Bonhoeffer for picturing God as “totally powerless” (140 (148)).

10.3.c.ii Van Gennep and Sölle

Largely in line with Berkhof’s attempt to hold power and love together despite all their tension, Van Gennep emphasized that the power of God is a power sui generis, one that is strange to our normal conceptions (416). God exerts his power through his word, meeting us as command and as promise (418), but in order to work, his word must be accepted and affirmed by the human being. Depending on the human answer, divine exercise of power becomes highly vulnerable, in particular when his word is simply ignored. (421). And because this is certainly no exception, the history of God with humanity appears as the story of an unhappy love (372). The impotence (onmacht) of God is the “consequence of his love” (375) which prevents his power ever to become tyrannical (420). In reaction to Berkhof’s succinct form, Van Gennep suggested a remarkable alteration. Whereas Berkhof in the end explicitly and delib-

29 Berkhof, o.c., 135 (143): And in the rare cases that humans do accept God’s love and Spirit in their hearts they are sanctified “into the [very same] defencelessness of not avenging themselves, of turning the other cheek, of the preparedness to suffer”.

30 Berkhof, o.c., 135 (142f): With respect to creation Berkhof observes: “In creating man, God as it were recedes (is it really “as it were?” …) to make room for another”. With respect to the covenant with the unfaithful people of Israel, Berkhof remarks that God is constantly met with stubborn hostility or disobedience “without apparently having (or wanting to have) the power to force that partner to his will”. Nota bene Berkhof’s remarks between brackets.

31 Berkhof, o.c., 137f (145); Finally, Berkhof critically takes distance to Bonhoeffer, though with empathy for the situation of imprisonment from which he wrote his letters and papers, see Berkhof, o.c., 140 (148).

32 Berkhof, o.c., 139 (146f); also: “Only he can become almighty who in essence is such already”.

33 Numbers in tekst refer to F.O. van Gennep, De terugkeer van de verloren vader, Ten Have: Baarn 1989.
erately returned to God’s power as unrelinquishable, Van Gennep leaned to the other side by exchanging noun and adjective. Thus, Van Gennep changed defenseless superior power into powerful or mighty defenselessness motivating his point as follows.

For Berkhof the accent lies on the noun [power]. In his defenselessness, God can yield making the necessary room for the human being, because he knows that he will win. (…) But I [Van Gennep] do not primarily believe that his power is full of (defenseless) love but rather that his love (defenseless-ness) is full of power. This love is such that it will not in the end ‘fight down’ the powers and humans, but ‘win’ them.34

It is precisely this atypical image of power, exclusively exerted by the defenselessness of love which, according to Van Gennep, applies to the “messianic power” in Jesus of Nazareth. He was feared and crucified not on account of his “defenseless superior power” but seeing the “superior power of his defenselessness” which appeared to have a “mysterious authority” over both humans and structures of society35. The power of God, revealed in Jesus

is the opposite of the so called power of Goliath which is the power of musclemen and tyrants … The Bible says that “the weakness of God is stronger than human strength”. (I Cor.1,25). When God does not flee from suffering, and Jesus takes suffering and death upon himself, an imperishable power is born that is willing to administer and serve, mediate, distinguish, heal, and save. It is power that spares the unfaithful ally and rescues the enemy from his enmity. Gods power does not only not escape from suffering, but it comes to expression even in suffering.36

The final words in the quotation “… even in suffering” are remarkable, as if Van Gennep too steps back for the radical conclusion. Why does Van Gennep not say that Gods power comes to expression “… most particularly, or most strongly as suffering”?! Suffering does not stand opposite to the power of defenselessness but is its most radical expression. Where else could defenselessness finally - when rejected, attacked, captured - proof its ultimate ‘power’ than in suffering, as Jesus revealed to Peter: “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me” (Jn 18,11).

But it seems that Van Gennep finally chose to evade the ultimate consequence of really and radically separating all forms of ‘forcefully overruling power’ from the image of God. Whereas Berkhof had problems with the ultimate consequence drawn by Bonhoeffer, Van Gennep still placed the latter’s maxim above the introduction of his book: Nur der leidende Gott kann helfen.37 On his turn, however, Van Gennep

34 Van Gennep, De terugkeer van de verloren vader, 375f.: “Voor hem (Berkhof) ligt het accent op het zelfstandig naamwoord. God wijkt wel terug in zijn weerloosheid en laat de mens de hem toekomende ruimte, maar Hij doet dat, ‘omdat Hij weet, dat Hij het wint’. (…) Ik geloof niet primair dat zijn macht liefdevol (weerloos) is, maar dat zijn liefde (weerloosheid) machtig is. Die liefde zal de machten en de mens niet ‘overwinnen’ in het einde, maar ‘winnen’.”
35 Van Gennep, o.c., 435: “Niet vanwege zijn ‘weerloze overmacht’, maar om de overmacht van zijn weerloosheid wordt Hij gekruisigd. (…) Zijn ‘geheimzinnige macht’ over mensen en structuren moet te niet gedaan worden”. In the main tekst I have translated: mysterious authority (ffo).
36 Van Gennep, o.c., 435: Gods macht gaat niet alleen niet opzij voor het lijden, maar ze komt zelfs in het lijden tot expressie.
37 Van Gennep, o.c., 8.
showed similar objection (as Berkhof had to Bonhoeffer) against Dorothee Sölle’s radical rejection of power as an essential of God. With Sölle, Van Gennep observes critically, God disappears in his love and is no longer ‘God’ in the classical sense of the word, which includes the two poles of both love and power. In her perspective God succumbs in the suffering of the human being. She went wrong, according to Van Gennep, when she left the language of parable and made ontological statements. It is not clear to me, though, what is wrong with ontological statements, since ‘God in the classical sense’ is also explained in such statements. The main point is that Van Gennep and Sölle gave voice to the very same theological and ethical objections against the belief in a God with unequivocal ‘commanding executive power’. The difference between the two is that Sölle (like Bonhoeffer) was willing to take far-reaching theo-ontological conclusions from which Van Gennep in the end, like Berkhof, shied away.

In order to grasp and comprehend the more radical perspective (advocated by Bonhoeffer, Sölle), Scheler’s (theological-metaphysical) anthropology can provide us with an adequate and illumining conceptualization. On the one hand: the element of defencelessness is expressed in Scheler’s statement that (God or) Spirit has “no original creative power”, implying the Spirit’s dependence on outer bodies, forces, or centres of representation and acting (10.3.a). On the other hand, the positive potential of divine defencelessness is that Spirit is perfectly “autonomous in its being and laws”, maintaining its integrity and freedom over the very same symbols, bodies, forces and centres it simultaneously needs for action and realization. Power of God is like the exousia claimed by Jesus in the closing lines of Matthew, not so much referring to outer power but rather to inescapable inner authority.

10.4 Application to the sources - collecting the results

The perspectives offered by Scheler throw light on both parties involved in sin, apart as well as in their mutual entanglement. In fact, his presentation of the human side implies the adoption of a theological or metaphysical element (S/spirit) as necessary and essential constituent of human personhood. I will now apply Scheler’s insights and use them for a final assessment of the sources, in particular of their perspective on both sides of the sin relationship, that is, on the human person (a) and on S/spirit or God (b). In this evaluation, I will re-establish both parties involved in sin, the human and the divine, for my reformulation of sin in the final paragraph (§11).

10.4.a The human person: where the human and the divine meet

The attractiveness of Scheler’s anthropology is that it describes the three main aspects of human personhood as a cohesive whole, consisting of my essential self (‘spirit’), my outer self as psycho-physical person (‘ego’), and my actual existence in

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38 Van Gennep, o.c., 375: “There can no longer be any connection between God and his power (transl. ffo).
39 Van Gennep, o.c., 376; ‘... omdat zij niet meer de taal der gelijkenis spreekt. ... zij laat zich verleiden tot zijnsuitspraken’.
40 Mt. 28, 18: πασα 'εξουσία; also Mk. 1,27 – εξουσία.
41 Clearly, this is an allusion to the subtitle of Matthew Fox’s book Creativity: Where the Divine and the Human meet.
what I am and do (‘actuality’). Thus, he draws an integrated picture of what it means to be a human person, granting each aspect to fulfil its indispensable role. Being inspired by S/spirit, and intentionally taking part in its drive is the epitome of human being. S/spirit is the element stemming from elsewhere, either of divine origin or from the ground of being. But even though S/spirit is the essence of human being, I/it still needs the outer, psycho-physical ego person in order to become actual and active. The outer psycho-somatic system as such, is what we share with animals. What identifies me as human in contrast to other beings is that as psycho-physical ego, I let myself be governed by S/spirit and, in turn, try to act and proceed in the S/spirit’s direction, facilitating and fostering the S/spirit’s energy and working. The advantage of this perspective, compared to both Roberts and ACiM and also to Barth, is that it supplies for a clear upgrading or rehabilitation of the psycho-physical or outer ego person. The psycho-physical ego is not only the necessary sub-structure of spirit, but it is nothing less than the meeting place where the human and the divine – psycho-physical ego and the S/spirit - come together and mutually touch upon one another. The effect of this divine-human meeting, the “actuality” it leads to, comes close to what Fox designated as creativity (5.3.b).

Compared to Roberts, ACiM and Barth, however, the integrated picture drawn by Scheler implies a significant correction. Although all three allow a duality in their anthropology, they seem to prevent the two elements to really meet. Roberts distinguished between outer and inner self, ACiM between illusory ego and real spirit self. Barth distinguished the being I have in myself from the being I have in Christ. But with each of them, one pole of the duality is emphasized so strongly that the other pole is actually absent, implying that real contact or interaction between the two is practically denied. This is most strongly true with ACiM, in which the lower pole is ignored altogether as illusory. With Roberts, in ordinary existence inner and outer self actually remain separated. Given the status quo of the outer ego’s limitation and ignorance, there is no contact since my outer person has no conscious awareness of my inner self. But as soon as the outer ego comes to awareness of the inner self, it is at once elevated. As Roberts experienced herself, the outer person gets engulfed by the spiritual dimension in “a fantastic avalanche of radical, new ideas” (§3, intro) so strongly that as ego it no longer exists. Barth described the actual human person as the “man of sin” (7.2 intro), standing in unbridgeable opposition to the divine. If the “man of sin” wants to come nearer to God in doing and being, he has “to be completely replaced by the new man in Christ” (7.2.b.ii). But the replacement of a person is removing a person, not bringing him into an encounter. With Barth too, not unlike Roberts, it is a matter of either … or. Either I have my being in myself, then I am a sinner and there is no God, no Spirit in me, or I have my being in Christ, then I am a holy person, but there is nothing of my present ‘me’ in Christ. There is no actual reality where the human and the divine really meet and touch. Moreover, this pattern of practically shutting out the human side in the divine-human relationship seems to recur even in Jesus Christ, as a consequence of Barth’s strong support for the an/enhypostasy speculation, implying the trivialization of the human nature as in docetism.42

In each of these three sources either all emphasis is put on the divine or on the hu-

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42 Thus, even in Jesus Christ, according to Barth’s presentation, it is only God that matters. It is important to see that precisely this statement or insight can become a truth to worship and venerate for one, while it may be felt as an element of estrangement by the other, asking: how then does it connect with me?
man side - either on the inner spiritual self or the outer physical ego - but they do not acknowledge a real meeting between the two sides in which both parties touch upon each other and interact, either in cooperation or through antagonism. Precisely on this point the Creation spirituality of Fox, intent on creatively contacting the Cosmic Christ inside through Living Cosmology, and Tillich’s concepts of New Being and Essentialization show more affinity with Scheler’s perspective on the human person in whom outer and inner, S/s/m/pirit and body, essence and existence, God and humans, really touch and get together.

I conclude that the occurrence of a real coming together between the human and the divine is prerequisite and vital in order to speak of either sin or sanctity. The spirit-oriented human ego-person is the place where this meeting occurs. This identifiable and objectifiable spirit-person is the intended playground for sanctity but can also be a ‘crime scene’ of sin.

10.4.b God is Spirit, not every S/s/m/pirit is God

Above (in section 10.3) I have made the attempt at describing how Scheler’s perspective on ‘spirit-based personhood’ can be applied to the biblical God. In doing so, I used the terms God, the divine, S/s/m/pirit and such interchangeably without clear differentiation and distinction. I will make up for this omission by correlating Scheler’s metaphysical anthropology to Tillich’s metaphysical theology which I will designate as symbolical theism (see below, 10.4.b.iii). Clearly, such procedure of applying anthropology and metaphysical theory with regard to theology and religious experience is valid as far as it goes with at least two restrictions. On the one hand, when applying Scheler’s idea of spirit theologically, I have no intention to rebaptize or annex him again as a Christian (see above 10.2). But I will use his religious-metaphysical anthropology to articulate and elucidate the theological perception of God as rather S/s/m/pirit than person (i. Divinity not primarily person but S/s/m/pirit: from theism to en-theism). On the other hand, this application must keep in touch with biblical witness, as with religious experience, not only with present-day (or post-Christian) experience but also with traditional religious experience. On this point I will apply Tillich’s theory of symbolism (8.1.1.d-e) in the third subsection (iii. Divine Spirit symbolized as God).

In the midsection, I will address an omission in Scheler’s take of S/s/m/pirit. Apparently, he acknowledged as additional and determining principle only one absolute identity of S/s/m/pirit which he pictured in an exclusively Christian-humanistic sense. He did not consider the possible reality of other spirits or principles (ii. Identification of S/s/m/pirit).

10.4.b.i Divinity not primarily person but S/s/m/pirit: from theism to en-theism

The central element in Scheler’s metaphysical anthropology is that, whether seen as stemming from an adopted deitas or from the ultimate Ground of Being, what in either way enters a human being from elsewhere – that is, from beyond our rational, psycho-physical existence - is the principle designated as “spirit” (Geist). I will correlate Scheler’s principle with Tillich’s metaphysical designation of God as “unconditional being” or “something unconditional”. They converge to the extent that both designations express the very same essential characteristic attributed by Scheler to ‘spirit’ (Geist), namely strict objectivity and transcendence (Leibüberhobenkeit) (9.3.c). Both “S/s/m/pirit” and “unconditional being” are absolute in the sense of “autonomous in its being and laws” (10.2.b.ii) while simultaneously fully dependent on
outer representation. With Tillich too, the break-through of something unconditional is nothing, when it is not adopted and carried with unconditional concern that is unleashed in somebody. In both perspectives, when applied theologically, God is not primarily seen as person, rather as S/spirit\(^{33}\) which is not in conflict with biblical witness and in accordance with Christian faith. Christian religious experience is always primarily experience of Spirit, even with respect to experiences that are explicitly articulated in terms of meeting with Jesus or God the Father. In both cases they are entirely spiritual, like e.g., the occurrence of St. Paul meeting Jesus (Acts 9). And explicitly seeking the countenance of God the Father as in prayer is also seen as a coming together in spirit, either ‘from below’ (spirit seeking Spirit) or ‘from above’ (Spirit representing spirit).\(^{34}\) S/spirit, according to Scheler, is the principle which elevates a psycho-physical organism (or outer ego-person) into a genuine human person capable of transcendence or taking distance to all things including oneself.

If interpreted religiously, the inherent tendency is towards \textit{en-theism}, which is indeed the perspective Scheler came to adopt; \textit{en-theism}, not pan-en-theism since he attributed S/spirit not to all beings but only to \textit{human} beings. In particular his perspective on S/spirit as autonomous in It/its direction and laws but simultaneously fully depending on representing elements or bodies for actualization, unmistakably moves away from a theistic, extra-mundane and self-sufficient Deity.\(^{44}\) Thus Scheler came to reject the basic presupposition of theism: a spiritual, personal God omnipotent in his spirituality. For us the basic relationship between man and the Ground of Being consists in the fact that this Ground comprehends and realizes itself directly in man, who, both as spirit and as life, is but a partial mode of the eternal spirit and drive.\(^{46}\)

Obviously, this idea of S/spirit being in need of footholds in existence for its self-development and realization was already presented by Spinoza, Hegel and others. But their mistake was, according to Scheler, to present spirit as an inevitable intellectual truth enforcing itself as if “Being becomes conscious of itself in man in the same act by which man sees himself grounded in this being”.\(^{47}\) But this is not how it works. Since such religious experience or metaphysical awareness (of receiving S/spirit or unconditional concern from a place beyond our psycho-physical self, be it from a Deity or a supposed Ground of Being) is by no means a matter of fact, neither is it an

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\(^{33}\) For the near equation of S/spirit and God in Tillich: see \textit{ST} I, 249: “God as living is God fulfilled in himself and therefore spirit. God \textit{is} spirit. This is the most embracing, direct, and unrestricted symbol for the divine life. It does not need to be balanced with another symbol, because it includes all the ontological elements”. Tillich, too, struggled with lower/capital case: how is spirit related to Spirit? When in religious contexts spirit is applied to God, it is mostly spelled with a capital S, but said Tillich: “It is impossible to understand the meaning of Spirit [capital S] unless the meaning of spirit [lower case s] is understood, for Spirit is the symbolic application of spirit to the divine life” (\textit{ST} I, 249).

\(^{34}\) Biblical examples: of spirit seeking Spirit, cf. Jn 4,20-24: “God is spirit, and those who worship him ... [need not go to this place or that, to Mount Gerizem or Mount Sion but] ... must worship in spirit and truth”. For an example of Spirit coming to spirit, cf. Rom. 8: 26: “... the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans”.

\(^{44}\) This tendency is also part of the idea of God suffering in his creatures which Dorothee Sölle explained by referring to the divine immanence in the world called the \textit{Sjechienah}, see: Sölle, \textit{Lijden}, 112.

\(^{46}\) \textit{Man’s place in Nature}, 92.

\(^{47}\) Scheler, \textit{o.c.}, 92f.
object of distanced intellectual insight. Far from working like an automatism it

is the result of the active commitment of our own being to the ideal demand of deitas and
the attempt to fulfil this demand. In and through this fulfilment, man cooperates in the cre-
ation of God, who emerges from the Ground of Being in a process whereby spirit and drive
interpenetrate increasingly 48

Rationally adopting a (pan-)en-theist perspective – as a non-committing idea-
may lead occasionally to interesting conversation at a party, but genuine action and
movement of S/spirit comes to existential experience, becomes living reality only
through personal dedication and commitment. Divine or non-divine S/spirit has really
stirred me no sooner than when I personally dedicate myself to its ‘higher demand’
or passion. Only then S/spirit really touches and inspires me and becomes my own
spirit, directing and determining my concern. The willingness to interact with (the
dynamics of) the unconditional spiritual principle resembles the receptive and intu-
itive openness towards the universe and its workings upon us, which according to
Schleiermacher forms the heart of the religious “feeling” (Gefühl), resulting in the
awareness of being absolutely dependent, which he identified with the “consciousness
… of being in relation with God”.49 Clearly, there is great affinity between Scheler’s
“commitment” and Tillich’s “ultimate concern” which, too, is the cooperative coming
together of the ultimate S/spirit with an unconditional call on the one hand, and the
personal drive or concern of humans engaging themselves in a dedicated response.
Personal commitment is also a basic element in Fox’ living cosmology!

So, when we accept as presupposition that God is primarily Spirit and reconnect
this with Scheler’s anthropology in combination with his perspective of en-theism,
we can state on the one hand that divine or holy Spirit in order to become actual in
the world, depends on human commitment and representation, that is on the cooper-
ation of psycho-physical ego persons. On the other hand, as merely psycho-physical
ego apart from S/spirit, I am not as such yet a human person in the full sense. I be-
come one when touched and led by S/spirit (Geist). S/spirit then is not It/itself person,
but a person making principle or characteristic. Through inspiration, S/spirit makes
the outer psycho-physical ego into a human person and simultaneously, in a meeting
place with the (divine) Ground of Being. Once being together, S/spirit is the principle
that enables me to take objectifying distance to and transcend all things including my
psycho-physical self, including its ego interests; further to collect and concentrate my
ego-self to a certain goal, inspiring me with corresponding passion to live and behave
and act accordingly. The S/spirit inspiring me empowers my behaviour and guides my
action, provided that my ego is cooperating. In short, it is the principle that gives my
actual being its focus, its identity. This brings us to the question, unattended until now,
regarding the identity of the inspiring spirit itself.

10.4.b.II IDENTIFICATION OF S/SPRIT.

In his last work Man’s Place in Nature, Scheler identified spirit (Geist) largely as
the benevolent (Christian-)Humanistic principle inspiring humankind towards intu-
ition, (self-) transcendence, and acts of kindness, love, remorse, reverence, wonder

48 Scheler, o.c., 93.
... and free decision (9.3.b). I assume that opposing attitudes like (moderated) egotism or selfishness are not linked with S/spirit, since they are part of the complex of psycho-physical drives and instincts we share with animal beings. With humans, however, egotism and selfishness can exceed the normal and necessary proportion of self-maintenance and self-protection to such extent, both in scale and in nature, that simply referring to primordial drives and animal instincts is hopelessly inadequate. Regarding forms of unlimited striving for power, wealth, growth, in personal, political and economic life; or with respect to examples of unrestrained hostility, intentional use of excessive force and violence as e.g., in the case of genocide; or, on the other end, attitudes of deliberate indifference towards others, immoral impunity, or flat banality, we must ask: aren’t these acts ‘spiritual’ acts too? Clearly, they cannot be seen as inspired by S/spirit (Geist) as proclaimed in the ideal Christian or Humanist tradition, neither can they be seen as part of the complex of drives and instincts humans share with the animal world. It seems plausible to say that these acts stem directly or indirectly from a quite different spirit. But apart from the one universal and humanizing S/spirit, Scheler did not recognize the possible reality of other spirits: of a different brand and identity.

Therefore, in place of assuming one absolute S/spirit unfailingly realizing itself in outer, existential reality, I suggest that the notion ‘spirit’ must be taken in two ways, firstly as a *generic name*. This implies, secondly, the hypothetical reality of possibly a plenitude of spirits, or at least more than one. Each spirit has its own identity, and each spirit applies for human dedication, participation, cooperation according to its own rules and laws. The plausibility of such a court of spirits, whether ‘heavenly’ or ‘profane’, secular or divine, but all pushing their contradictory agendas onto earthly mortals, is not altogether zero, if we imagine the global pandemonium today of tensions, conflicts and violence, either in general between humankind and the planet, our home; or erupting between individuals and groups of conflicting interests, peoples, nations, religions. As a matter of fact, the idea of many spiritual dominances or gods was by no means foreign to the experience of the biblical witnesses.

That there may be “gods many and lords many” is not denied by St. Paul (1Kor. 8:5,6). A similar suggestion is made by the composer of Psalm 82, singing about God taking his stand in the council of the gods. Another witness is Job 1,6 narrating about the heavenly gathering of “the sons of God” even including Satan, all of them undoubtedly trying to inspire their own life-force and acts into human mortals, such as judging unjustly, granting favor to the wicked and the like (Ps.82,2). In the synoptic Gospels, the proclamation of the Kingdom suggests a hierarchy of heavenly and earthly powers, demons, angels, gods and lords, that have taken possession of crowds of people, making them lunatic, or sick with diseases and torments. But against this old hierarchy of evil powers, the strange new regiment of the Kingdom of God is presented by the Saviour, driving the demons out, healing the palsy and the paralysed, and bringing a new ‘spirit’ to the multitudes (Mt. 4, 23f).

Without arguing about a precise number, it may be useful to follow Jesus, who on one occasion seems to reduce the profuse pantheon of many spirits and powers to a basic and manageable couple, suggesting two spiritual-religious options of which you can really put into practice only one, since no one can serve two masters: “you cannot serve God and Mammon” (Matth. 6,24). Remarkably, these two deep rooted concerns and their corresponding deity or spirit can each be linked to one of Schel-
er’s anthropological distinctions. On the one hand, what Jesus designates as serving God can be realized in following and fostering the principle identified as S/spirit in a Christian-humanistic sense. In that case, the principle S/spirit (Geist) is what inspires humans and gives them sufficient orientation towards caring for the interest and well-being of others, like you care for yourself. Either in the sense of Christianity as Holy Spirit, or metaphysically derived from a supposed ground of being in Humanistic terms: in both cases S/spirit involves inspiration toward an attitude of ‘all humans count equally’. Taken in this way, S/spirit is indeed a principle that comes “in addition” to the psycho-physical (or ego-) system we have in common with animal life, and which is principally intent on self-maintenance of the individual organism, and preservation of its own species.

On the other hand, it is precisely the focus, not only on reasonable self-maintenance but on ego-aggrandizement at all costs and without limits, to which the Mammon appeals and inspires. Dedication to the Mammon spirit is actualized in the obsessive pursuit of ever growing power and wealth as ultimate aim - if necessary at the expense of others. The Mammon tells my ego-person that it is primarily, no! only “Me, Myself, I” that count,\(^50\) of course with the inclusion of my own kin, clan, country. Apart from its limitless character, my further point is that in the formal sense, the spirit symbolized by Jesus as Mammon supplies for similar if not the very same spiritual skills of taking distance, even self-transcendence, objectivity, intuition and free choice. Like the Christian/humanistic S/spirit, the Mammon spirit and its ‘religion’ called Free Market, also has its autonomy in rules and laws, while being powerless in itself. The power of the financial market, too, depends largely, if not entirely on trust, and on the dedication of its ‘believers’ and followers, similar to the religious-humanistic S/spirit. But its acts and identity, its targets and promises are different.\(^51\)

The conclusion, then, is that being inspired as such is entirely open concerning its content and the diametrically diverging or opposing targets it may lead to. All depends on the identity of the inspiring S/spirit. Now, what is helpful and relevant in order to identify the S/spirit inspiring you in such a way that you intentionally follow its blowing and freely comply to its demands – at least in inner circle of beloved ones - is the use and application of symbols. It is in the dimension of symbolism that diverging types of (absolute) commitment and religious experience (varying from traditional to not so traditional) can not only be commeasured but may even be shared. Actually, this brings us to the question announced earlier (5.4.2.d) whether and how the intentionally (pan-)en-theistic perspective - envisioning divine reality primarily as indwelling principle or spirit - is compatible with the outspoken theistic experience in which divine reality is taken as an extramundane Creator God in personal terms.

10.4.b.iii Divine Spirit symbolized as God

Although the combination of a theistic with a (pan-)en-theistic perception of divinity is part of the doctrinal heart of Christianity,\(^52\) and was in some sense also pres-

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\(^50\) Association with the title song by Joan Armatrading of her eponymous album *Me, Myself, I* (1980).

\(^51\) For an insight in the life of those working in the City, financial heart of London, see Luyendijk, *Among the Bankers* (translation of: *Dit kan niet waar zijn*). The financial world, too, demands extreme sacrifices and total dedication. See 11.2.a, note 13.

\(^52\) The doctrine of Trinity describes a close combination of (mono-)theism (God the Father), human-di-
ent in Platonism, theism and (pan-)en-theism have most often been considered as mutually exclusive. Admittedly, strains of en-theism have entered Christian religious experience, since the early apologetics introduced Greek, in particular (Neo-)Platonist philosophy in the doctrine of faith. And it is true that there have been moments in which platoic-esoteric spirituality was sympathetically embraced by prominent representatives of Christianity, as in the Florentine Platonic Academy (2.1.2.c.i). Most of the time, however, esoteric-platonic perspectives and spirituality were rejected, not only from the side of Christian orthodoxy, but also by modern empirical scientists and Enlightenment philosophers. Thomasius’ anti-apologetic agenda (discussed in 2.1.2.c.ii) is part of a continuing line of anti-platonic, anti-pan(en)theist criticism raised by orthodox Christianity (2.1.2.c.ii). The same spiritual dichotomy in Western Culture is described by Fox as the two rivalling traditions centring around either Fall and Redemption or Creation Spirituality (5.1 intro). Schleiermacher was disqualified for “pantheistic Spinozism” with respect to his Speeches on Religion (1.2 intro), and again after the publication of Christian Faith (1.2.1). These are just a few examples showing that in the Christian Era, theism and (pan-)entheism were generally regarded as being irreconcilably at odds with one another, despite their peacefully being linked together in the Trinitarian doctrine.

Thus, the picture of an extra-mundane Creator-God existing strictly separated from his creation on the one hand, and the perspective of the divine as immanent spiritual principle permeating all of creation, on the other, could never explicitly and really be integrated. Instead, both in terms of mainstream Christianity as well as according to historiographic science and phenomenology of religion, their “logical incompatibility” is generally taken for granted. Mono-theism and cosmo-theism (or pan-en-theism) are considered as simply “two mutually exclusive systems”. Nevertheless, though perhaps not always in an entirely intelligible or coherent way, theism and en-theism are very often combined in practical faith and spiritual experience. Thus, one can

rected en-theism (Jesus Christ) and pan-en-theism (Holy Spirit). For a pan-en-theistic hymn enjoying the Spirit’s presence in or with all creation, sing John Bell’s She sits like a bird (Zij zit als een vogel, Lied 701 (NLB)).

53 As was the observation by Lovejoy (The Great Chain of Being), stating that Platonism seems to combine two ‘gods’, namely one that is portrayed as “the self-sufficient Absolute” and another that is seen as the “generative source of Being” pouring itself out in creation (see above 2.2.1.a).

54 See Hanegraaf, Esotericism and the Academy. Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture, 371f. Haneegraaff’s main thesis is that the long tradition of ancient pagan wisdom, designated with different names like Prisca theologia, philosophia perennis, or Platonic Orientalism (largely combining Oriental, Egypt, middle- and Neoplatonist and biblical-mosaic wisdom), and coming to the surface as “Western esotericism” in the Italian Renaissance (2.1.2.c.i), has been criticized, rejected - and then ignored - both from the side of mainstream Christian religion (2.1.2.c.ii) as by mainstream, modern science. Haneegraaff also gives a remarkable example of reverse spiritual animosity, represented by the Byzantine philosopher George Gemistos Plethon, delegate from the East, at a Council in Florence (1438/39) that was called together by the Pope. Plethon, strongly advocating the universal and perennial combination of ancient pagan wisdom (also designated as Platonic Orientalism) asserted that it would soon replace exclusive monotheism as presented in the bible by Moses, and Jesus, or in the Koran by Muhammad (Esotericism and the Academy, 38f). A more orthodox delegate to the Council later remarked that this had shocked him so deeply that he hated Plethon “ever after and feared him like a poisonous viper” (39).

55 From the side of Christian orthodoxy, the so called Platonismus-Vorwurf proved to be an effective polemic tool against Mystics, Enthusiasts, and philosophers with Spinozaic leanings, see Lehmann-Brauns, Weisheit in der Weltgeschichte, 32.

56 Hanegraaff, Esotericism and the Academy, 371, referring to Egyptologist Jan Assmann: “The opposite of monoteism is not polytheism, or idolatry, but cosmotheism, the religion of the immanent god...”
hear committed Christians explicitly reject theism and state they no longer believe in a personal God; that they see “God” rather as a principle to live by, e.g., an inspiring power of love; or an immanent spirit of responsibility and solidarity with others. Simultaneously, they are not disturbed in continuing to worship and pray, if not as concretely as to ask God personally to steer the medical surgeon’s hand for a successful operation, then in a no less sincere, liturgical litany on Sunday, begging the eternal One to come to the rescue of those who suffer where-ever on earth: Lord, have mercy, Kyrie eleison.

Both Fox and Tillich score a plus-minus on the entry of a personal extramundane God, revealing that they combined elements of theism and (pan-)en-theism. Fox had no problem linking theistic imagery (Creator, Artisan) with the religious experience of divinity in all things (5.4.2.d). Tillich showed a similar combination. More in particular, Tillich denied the existence of God while affirming God as a person. The logical coherence is supplied by his radical understanding of (the notion) ‘God’ as symbol. According to him there is no existing God, neither as an objectifiable inner-worldly person, nor as a trans-mundane, super-natural one. Instead, what is fundamental in Tillich’s metaphysical-ontological approach is, firstly, his statement of uncondition-al or absolute reality called by many names like Ground of being, Being itself, the Holy, essential being. And derived from this foundational reality, Tillich stated, that ‘something unconditional’ appears and works in everything conditioned. As observed earlier, I take this as largely and functionally equivalent with Scheler’s principle S/spirit.

A second statement of Tillich’s ontological approach is that humans can have and often do have direct awareness of unconditional reality in the feeling of being ultimately concerned. This happens when they are grasped by a certain cause with irrepressible passion and engage themselves to it with unconditional seriousness. The ultimacy of their concern is ‘direct’, which makes the concern undeniable, whereas its content is always mediated and a matter of consideration and decision. Thus, Tillich combined a ‘mystical a priori’ with a ‘cosmological principle’ (see 8.1.2.a.i).

Most significant in Tillich’s approach is, thirdly, his application of symbolism, stating that in the main religions, absolute reality including its ultimate demand and accompanying content, is symbolized and epitomized in the symbol God. What is attained and effectuated by using the symbol God, is that one’s ultimate concern is personified and can be addressed in a personal way, as God. And this can further develop into the symbolic I-Thou relationship of faith in which one’s ultimate concern is moulded and practiced. In this relationship we encounter, interact and converse with what is of ultimate importance to us through the highest symbol of what we ourselves are, person. (8.1.1.e.ii).57 God according to Tillich, is the major religious symbol of what is our most serious, ultimate concern, and as this symbol, God is eo ipso personal even though no-where in the outer universe is or dwells a person called God. In other words: the symbolic notion ‘personal God’ does not imply an existing God-individual.58 Thus with Tillich we are faced with the threesome combination of

57 Theology of Culture, 61f.

58 God is person or personal, but not: a person, see Tillich, ST I, 244f.: “The symbol ‘personal God’ is absolutely fundamental because an existential relation is a person-to-person relation. Man cannot be ultimately concerned about anything that is less than personal (…) ‘Personal God’ does not mean that God is a person. It means that God is the ground of everything personal and that he carries within himself the ontological power of personality. He is not a person, but he is not less than personal”.
non- or a-theism (denial of God’s existence), en-theism (something unconditional in everything conditioned), and theism (talk about a personal God), the latter clearly with the proviso that his God is meant as a highest symbol and certainly not as ‘a being’ in supra-naturalistic terms. Therefore, I propose that we can most adequately designate Tillich’s form of religion as symbolic theism. Actually, this seems to me a viable solution to the question of compatibility of cosmo-theism (pan-en-theism) and theism. Scheler’s spirit principle and Tillich’s unconditional element in ‘everything conditioned’ point to cosmo-theism, whereas representing the unconditional S/spirit of being with the symbol ‘personal God’ is theism, i.e. symbolic theism.

Yet, it is not clear whether according to Tillich one’s ultimate concern must necessarily be personalized as he seems to imply when saying: “Man cannot be ultimately concerned about anything that is less than personal” (nt. 58). My doubt stems from seemingly contradictory sayings by Tillich, namely that religious or ultimate concern is universally human (8.1.2.a.ii), whatever the content (8.1.2.a.ii). A small detour may be useful.

For Schleiermacher believing in or relating to a personal God was not a precondition for being religious. Therefore, he could praise Spinoza as highly religious. Schleiermacher himself took religion primarily as the ‘spirit of the universe’ working and acting on us; and correspondingly our becoming intentionally aware of it in the feeling of absolute dependency (and inter-dependency). So far, no personal God. But proceeding from this general take of religion, it depends, according to Schleiermacher, on your own imagination (Phantasie) and on whether you feel the need to personify the spirit of the universe or not. If you have this need and you want to personify, then you have a God (see 1.2.1). Then the spirit of the universe is symbolized and becomes the personal God for you, with whom you feel yourself standing in a relationship of absolute dependency and unity. It is remarkable and vital to realize that according to Schleiermacher, apparently, one does not firstly believe in God, and then secondly decide whether God is a person or not. Rather, it is the other way around. Namely, in case one has a preference for a personal relationship with the surrounding universal reality, then one automatically runs up against God. It is not a necessity, but if one does address the universe as God, then it should be realized and cannot be denied that the symbol God is eo ipso a person-like concept!

To some extent, the assumed unclarity on the side of Tillich can now be illumined with help of his distinction of a ‘mystical a priori’ which he integrated in his ‘cosmological principle’. The ‘a priori’ is ontological, i.e. direct and therefore spiritually inevitable. It is ‘experience’ of an ultimate demand, ‘feeling’ of being ultimately concerned. So far, it is religion-as-such, religion so to speak without or before (the personal) God. The cosmological part is secondary in relation to the direct ‘mystical’ experience, it follows the concern as its content, as the forms and ways of dealing with this content and bringing it into practice: these aspects all belong to the indirect or subject-object reality of the outer world, they are conditioned, not ultimate. No matter how absolute and direct the primary concern may be, but accepting it’s demands as the spoken Word of a divine Person or as the inescapable suggestion of a principle, letting

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59 Tillich formulated this principle as follows: “The Unconditioned of which we have an immediate awareness, without inference, can be recognized in the cultural and natural universe”. It actually states that one’s mystical a priori (= first part) can be recognized, takes form in the outer world of culture and nature (see 8.1.2.a.i).
it move you as S/spirit or speak to you as personalized Deity: in short, the entire religious practice (be it with ‘God’ or ‘spiritual principle’) is ‘cosmological’, results from one’s actual existence, one’s contingent situation. It all lies “in the cultural and natural universe” and depends on one’s (personal, social, existential, etc.) context.

Now, the distinction between 1. the ‘mystical a priori’ (direct feeling of ultimate concern, antecedent its content) and 2. it’s cosmological or outward appearance and realization (the content and forms it receives a posteriori, in actual life) may not fully remove the unclarity on Tillich’s part. But it certainly is helpful to localize my own attempt at reformulation of sin. The a priori concern is universally human, whereas its content, accepting or not accepting the symbol of a personal God and all further religious practice belong to the cosmological a posteriori sphere of contingencies. By consequence, a universal doctrine of sin which does not require – like Plantinga did - the theistic adoption of a personal God as precondition, must be applied to and connected with the direct mystical a priori. In other words, the essence of non-theistic sin must be described as opposition against the direct ‘mystical’ or unconditional concern by which one is grasped, no matter if the ultimate power behind this concern is symbolized through a personal God or not.

In order to proceed to the formulation of a non-theistic hamartiological concept in the next and final paragraph, I will now collect the main brick-stones that are highlighted in the present paragraph and will be part of the concept.

1. S/spirit as indication of immanent transcendence (in accordance with all sources).
2. God and the human being both conceived as essentially ‘spirit’. This promotes ‘spirit’ rather than ‘personal’ as connecting concept between the divine and the human.
3. An identifiable, responsible human person is needed to represent S/spirit which asks for a rehabilitation of the ego (contra Roberts, *A Course in Miracles*)
4. The traditional essence of sin is its being anti-divine. This implies opposition (Barth), but not over against an instance that is distant or found outside the concrete individual but over against something transcendent (S/spirit) in oneself (in accordance with Roberts, *A Course in Miracles*, Fox, Tillich)
5. As such, that is, as personal lapse, sin can be described in terms of sloth or laziness, coming close to what Barth designated as “dissipation or indiscipline with respect to one self” (7.2.2.a.iii); or to what Fox designates as refusal to (co-)create (5.2.d) and acedia (5.3.b); the result is alienation (Tillich) from one’s spiritual essence.
6. This leads to a concept of sin as: ignoring or negating one’s own part of S/spirit in thinking, speaking and acting (10.1; 10.2.c: example of an average human being).
§ 11 A reformulation of sin – gains and losses

The opposite of love is not hatred but indifference

In the previous paragraph, various types of religious awareness were identified: non-theism, en-theism, theism. Of the first type are those who see themselves explicitly as non-theist or even as a-theist. They reject the idea of one or more person-like Deities (Roberts, Fox, Tillich). The second type of en-theism, we found as pan-en-theism or cosmo-theism (Roberts, Fox and to some extent: Tillich); and as en-theism, meaning S/spiritual presence in particular in humans (Scheler, Tillich). En-theism applies to Christians who say they do not (or no more) believe in the idea of a separately existing, personal God and, instead, assume a divine inspiration, principle or ‘something’ working in humans. But in case they nevertheless keep up traditional religious practices, like reading the Bible and telling stories about the Eternal One to their (grand-) children, going to church, and directing prayers and praise to God etc., they actually remain theists: they persist in talking about God. However, since they do not take the biblical stories and images - including the ‘figure’ God - literally, but symbolically, it is more correct and adequate to characterize them as symbolic-theist. To a large extent, symbolic theists employ the same God-talk as traditional theists. The difference between the two concerns ontological imagination. In contrast to ‘symbolic (en-)theists’, traditional theists have less problems with literalism and are more naturally inclined to simply accept the bible stories as they read or hear them. Based on that, they have faith in the spiritual reality of a good, reliable God, they can relate to through Jesus as His son, who is also their royal brother and Lord.

Each type has its own – if I may say so – inconsistencies, at least in the eyes of the other types. At the end of this paragraph I will go into some of them (11.3). But first, now, I will present a reformulation of sin (11.1) and discuss some of the gains and losses (11.2).

11.1 A non-theistic concept of sin

As the Plantinga formulation consists of three structural elements: God, the human being, and the oppositional interaction between them, so does my non-theistic reformulation. Its three elements are: the inner S/spiritual self (a), the outer human person, i.e. the psycho-physical ego (b) and the interaction between them (c). I will describe each element in relation to my previous investigations, illuminating my point with some examples derived from human existence. My non-theistic concept runs as follows.

Sin is S/self denial through personal sloth or laziness;
It implies: neglecting and forgetting my own essential spirit, my very human self

11.1.a Spiritual self

The spiritual self is equivalent to the divine element in the traditional concept. The S/spirit-self can be derived from an assumed religious-theological or metaphys-

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1 A remarkable parallel of self-forgetfulness can be found in James 1,23-24: Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.
ic-philosophical origin. Thus, it can be thought as stemming either from divine origin, from God, or from what Scheler, like Tillich, designated as the Ground of all Being'. For that reason, I often write S/spirit with Capital/lower case S/s (see §10, nt. 43; §9, nt. 85). In both cases S/spirit is the guiding principle or dynamic ‘breath’ from elsewhere, be it from God or the ground of being. Firstly, this implies transcendence qua origin and ‘being’. S/spirit is not, so to speak, coming up from our psycho-physical existence but is coming into it, or coming to it. Secondly, in human existence, this principle is a power of transcendence, implying the potential of strict objectivity, not only towards outer reality in general but in particular of self-transcendence. Thirdly, this S/spirit principle is a directing, though not an executive ‘power’, since it depends on the psycho-physical person (outer ego-subject) for actualization and realization. Fourthly, and most importantly, this S/spirit principle is not just a formal potential but has a ‘face’. With this last remark I mean that, far from being an unidentified fleeting ‘object’, this foreign principle ‘spirit’ has its own laws and values. Its inspiration has a definite identity, described by Scheler as a specifically defined class of values and acts, largely converging with the central commandment of love in Christian religion (9.3.e). It concerns a S/spirit or principle that is humanity-disposed, creatively intent on fostering and birthing life. Above I suggested the example of an average individual (10.2.c), gifted with this unforced S/spiritual self, that I assume to be the real/original essence of any human being.

Clearly, this principle called ‘spirit’ partly coincides with the animal drive of preservation of the own group or species (10.4.b.ii), but only half-way, namely to the extent that one is naturally intent on protecting and serving oneself and one’s own sort, family and friends. But in addition to this common animal drive, a human being’s spirit-self has as its essential characteristic the capacity of strict objectivity and transcendence. This implies the further going ability to take distance: in particular to oneself and one’s self-interest as outer psycho-physical or ego-person. In fact, this ‘characteristic’ of S/spirit is what separates humans from animals. It includes the capacity of taking distance to one’s inner circle or intimate habitat. Up to this point, the notion of an inner or spiritual essential self that is somehow transcending one’s outer actual person, is commensurable with the all the sources. Thus, Roberts has her inner self; ACiM: mind or spirit; Fox: Cosmic Christ; Tillich: something uncondition-al/essential being; Barth: my being in Christ. The spiritual self can also be seen as the dynamic or pneumatologically equivalent of the classic notion of the imago Dei after which humankind is created (Gen.1,26). Below we will meet other more or less equivalent notions like ‘soul’, ‘conscience’, ‘life’, ‘inner law’ (11.2).

The presupposition of my concept of sin is that every human being has some amount of ‘S/spiritual self’ as identified above, including some potential of self-transcendence. The core of sin is that this S/spiritual essence is somehow denied by oneself which may imply: missed, neglected, overgrown, suppressed, abandoned, betrayed, lost and forgotten. In all forms, the result is that the active or actual person one is, becomes willingly a stranger to his/her own original S/spirit, i.e. to the essential person one is. Thus, the result of sin comes close to what Tillich designated as estrangement, sin itself approximates Barth’s notion of sloth, in particular as dissipation (Verlotter-
ung.) or indiscipline with respect to oneself (7.2.2.a.iii), ignoring the ‘self’ one is “in Christ”. It also comes close to the awareness of acedia or Ican’t-ism, pusillanimity or the refusal to create, as described by Fox (5.3.b).

11.1.b The ego-person

Concerning the psycho-physical or outer ego person there is less resemblance among the sources (10.2.a). Fox and Tillich did not adopt a strong opposition between inner and outer and did not have such low or critical esteem of the concrete, outer person as Roberts (ignorance), ACiM (illusion) and Barth (highly inventive in sinful sloth, impotent in works of praise). In relation to their views, I use Scheler’s balanced and integrated anthropology for recalling and upgrading, so to speak, the outer person (10.4.a) which can also serve a better understanding of the coordination and interaction between inner spirit and outer ego, including their division of tasks. Actually, there is ample metaphysical-theological ground for a rehabilitation of the outer ego, granting it a larger and at least executive role.

The either metaphysical or theological basis for it is that, following Scheler, the psycho-physical ego (the human animal so to speak) is the landing place, and thus the meeting place where the two sides of personal human reality touch upon each other and can start to interact, no matter how these two sides are designated, either as psycho-physical organism & spirit principle (Scheler), inner self & outer ego (Roberts), spirit-mind & illusory ego (ACiM), cosmic world & cosmic Christ (Fox), essential being & existential being (Tillich), or as being in one self & being in Christ (Barth). Now, assuming that a genuine meeting between two ontologically distinct elements should imply mutual interaction, I concluded that in Roberts, ACiM and in Barth, a genuine meeting does not occur (10.4.a). With regard to Barth’s strong support of an enhypostasy, one can even question whether in Jesus Christ the divine and the human do really meet.

Barth’s positive and rather massive explication of the effective significance of enhypostasie implies that the “man” Jesus has his existence and the personal foundation of it, entirely in the Son of God, in the heavenly Logos, which is the second ‘prosopon’ in the Trinity. According to Barth this does not mean any deification of the Son of Man, neither does he become so to speak a fourth figure in the Holy Trinity. But it does mean that He necessarily “acquires and takes as man the same full share in its being and work in creation as He has in its inward life as God. Godhead surrounds this man like a garment and fills Him as the train of Yahweh filled the temple in Is. 6. This is the determination of His human essence” (94 (103)). In fact, Jesus Christ - as the Son of Man and “the Son of God which He is also and primarily” (curs.flo) (94 (104)) - was so powerfully, overwhelmingly and effectively determined by His divine origin that it was “His absolutely effective determination” (92f (102)) to the extent that “there is no other subject apart from the Son of God which can give even partially a different determination or character to human essence” (italics mine, 88 (96f)). Given such an extremely ‘high’ Christology – according to which the man Jesus was exclusively and totally determined from above - the question can hardly be suppressed what actually has been the contribution of the man Jesus to the appearance of the Saviour, apart from being flesh and bones. Jesus had no place for sinful action. Of course, He knew of its tempting existence, but He did not sin, says Barth “because and as He was man only as the Son of God, it was excluded from the choice of His acts. In virtue of this origin of His being, He was unable to choose it”.

If true, this exclusive enhypostasy

3 CD IV/2, 93 (102: “Sie (sc. die Sünde, ffo) war, von der Wahl seiner Taten ausgeschlossen. Er konnte
speculation also undermines Barth’s judgment that we, as humans and compared to Jesus Christ as our brother, should be ashamed for our sloth and for staying so far behind his royal humanity. Taking into account the divine and heavenly equipment so inconceivably and generously (but regrettably also exclusively) bestowed on one single specimen of ‘humanity’, it is hardly fair to accuse all other and ordinary humans of sloth and shame, whose ‘personalitas’ and spiritual outfit are so incomparably less godly equipped.

A rehabilitation of the outer ego person as landing-strip of S/spirit and as divine-human meeting place, does not imply a one-sided hallelujah on human splendour, but rather the sobering statement that the outer human person (as the possible entrance of divine or idealist-humanist, or of lesser Godly spirit), is the acting centre of either sanctity or sin, either ugliness or goodness and beauty. In the sense of executing outer creative power, the humanistic spirit-principle according to Scheler is as powerless as is the Creator Spiritus Dei as seen by Bonhoeffer, Sölle and, though not without reservation, by Berkhof and Van Gennep (10.3.c). This means in all cases that, be it for better or for worse, it always takes an outer psycho-physical being, that is: it always takes an ‘ego’ to get something done. Clearly, one may feel some discomfort now, since having a strong ego is often seen as negative. However, even a saint cannot do without it as may be illumined by two examples.

Firstly, there would have been less consolation and certainly no “lady with the lamp” on the battle fields of the Crimean War (1854/56) if it weren’t for the strong ego named Florence Nightingale, later also making her marks as social-medical reformer. And sure enough, when taking a more recent saint anno 1963, there would have been no “dream” of peace, justice and freedom in which people are no longer “judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character”, if it weren’t for the directing and normative S/spirit of dr. King’s faith. But it is also for certain that we would never have heard of his dream, since there would not even have been a march for peace to the USA capital, if it weren’t for the strong ‘ego’ called Martin Luther Jr.4 For the simple reason that at the very start of anything to occur, there always must be a psycho-physical “I” with some bravery and courage, not only to “have” a dream, but also, to create in the midst of relentless and violent opposition a nonviolent platform to make this dream public.

11.1.c Denial of one’s spirit-self - outer-personal laziness

So far, my definition of sin as S/self-denial, in combination with a rehabilitation or restoration (compared to Roberts, ACiM, Barth) of the outer ego person, may appear to be at odds with the known Christian virtue of self-denial, demanded by no one less than the Saviour himself. Therefore, I must further illumine both sides of human

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4 King’s strong ego appears clearly in the first but not so often cited part of his famous speech, in which he unmistakably informed his audience that “we have come to our nation’s capital to cash a check … that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice. Now is the time to rise …”. To those who hoped that the black Americans only needed to blow off steam, he had a clear warning. Those who think that we “will now be content, will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual. There will be neither rest nor tranquillity in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue …”. Clearly, it takes a firm ego to make such statements which was perhaps best understood and recognized by those who planned to assassinate dr. King some years later. His murderers too, had strong ego’s, though unfortunately inspired by not so righteous a spirit as his.
personhood: one’s S/spirit-self and one’s ego-person. I will describe their mutual role and what happens to each when their relationship turns into a relationship of sin. I will push the discussion forward based on some examples derived from various sources. In variant ways, the examples describe how the inner side (S/spirit, consciousness, soul) is being denied while the outer side displays a form of laziness. I start with an example derived from the very counterculture that initially co-determined the New Age movement.

Fitting my concept fairly well is a statement once made by Joan Baez (1941-), a prominent folksinger and songwriter of the protest movement in the 1960s. Criticizing the easy conformism of the moral majority supporting the Vietnam War, the then twenty-three-year-old Baez gave a perfect rendition of spiritual self-denial through personal sloth or laziness when she complained in an interview:

If everybody really listened to his own conscience, and really acted upon what he thought was right and wrong, rather than being so hopelessly passive which I think just about everybody is. I think it’s probably the main disease which is the passivity, where we will listen to whatever anybody else says. It’s Daddy, and Mommy, and schoolteacher, and Sunday-schoolteacher and President.

Critical but, fitting with her Quaker background and commitment to pacifism and social issues, Joan Baez actually remained rather mild in her analysis. There is rather a sense of shock and astonishment in her statement than of anger. More severity and rigorousness seems to breathe from the well-knows words by Jesus himself, summoning his disciples to deny themselves and accept whatever a life of imitatio Christi has in store for them.

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? (Marc. 8,34-37).

Clearly, with “denying themselves” and “losing their life” Jesus did not mean that they should be prepared to give up inner and outer life altogether, not their true spirit (or soul) but only, if it must be, their outer bodily existence. Positively speaking, he summoned whoever wants to follow him, to save their soul and not only their skin. On the other hand, it should be clear that saving the soul is not primarily achieved by killing the body or making oneself as small as possible. Instead we are summoned to live and act in our body - that is: as psycho-physical ego person – in obedience to our S/spiritual self. That we should deny ourselves, then, is precisely what Scheler designated as the essential characteristic of spirit, namely the potential of psycho-physical transcendence (Leibüberhobenheit): the capacity and willingness to strict objectivity even regarding oneself. What Jesus primarily asked was not that those who want to follow him should sacrifice their ego. Rather did he encourage them to be ego enough,

5 Quoted from the documentary movie made by Martin Scorsese about her fellow artist Bob Dylan at the time: No direction Home 2005. Clearly, I associate what Baez called “one’s own conscience” and one’s real thinking about right and wrong, with the “spiritual self” in my concept of sin. And passivity is a form of laziness.
and courageous enough to save their soul instead of anxiously saving or frantically promoting their outer existence. Instead, Jesus urges us ever to remain faithful towards our true S/spirit-self, and never to lose the soul and spiritual essence of our being. As long as the sun shines upon my face and a gentle wind is blowing on my back, there is little reason to deny my S/spirit-self. But what if darkness befalls on me. How far do I go when faced with the choice, either to safe my skin, or to follow my S/spirit-self?

This dilemma, I find empathically illustrated by Hannah Arendt, asking with respect to the Nazi regime, what it was that made the very few who determinedly refused to cooperate so different from the vast majority that did collaborate. On what ground were they capable to refuse when almost all others gave in? The answer, according to Arendt, is that “the non-participants … were the only ones who dared judge by themselves”. They made their own judgement, not because they were more intelligent, or more sophisticated in moral matters. Neither did they possess a more respectable or better system of values than many other members of respectable society had had before joining the Nazi regime. But those many had apparently been un-shocked by the intellectual and moral upheaval caused by and accompanying the rise of the Nazi party. They had simply exchanged one system of values against another. This reveals, according to Arendt, that there is no “automatic way” from a set of norms and values towards responsible moral behaviour. The “criterion”, said Arendt, that led those few in not cooperating with the regime was a different one:

They asked themselves to what extent they would still be able to live in peace with themselves after committing certain deeds; and they decided that it would be better to do nothing, not because the world would then be changed for the better, but simply because only on this condition could they go on living with themselves at all. Hence, they also chose to die when they were forced to participate. The precondition for this kind of judging is … the disposition to live together explicitly with oneself, to have intercourse with oneself, that is, to be engaged in that silent dialogue between me and myself which, since Socrates and Plato, we usually call thinking.

The kind of thinking Arendt had in mind, is “not technical and does not concern theoretical problems” even though it lies at the root of all philosophy. And the dividing line between those, tending to let others think for them and those who decidedly keep thinking and judging by themselves is not marked by social, cultural, educational, or religious differences. Most reliable, according to Arendt will be the doubters and sceptics, not because scepticism is good or doubting wholesome, but because they are used to examine things and to make up their own minds. Best of all will be those who know only one thing for certain: that whatever else happens, as long as we live we shall have to live together with ourselves.

7 Arendt, o.c., 44.
8 Arendt, o.c., 44f.
9 Arendt, o.c., 45; ‘religious’ added by me, ffo.
10 Arendt, o.c., 45.
But what to say of the obvious reproach of irresponsibility that can be raised against these few? Didn’t they just evade any political responsibility in order to keep their hands clean? According to Arendt political responsibility presupposes at least a minimum of political power of which those few had none in their situation under total dictatorship. Remarkably, the impotence and complete powerlessness of these few is valued by Arendt as more than being just a valid excuse, since it seems to require a certain moral quality even to recognize powerlessness, the good will and good faith to face realities and not to live in illusions. Moreover, it is precisely in this admission of one’s impotence that a last remnant of strength an even power can still be preserved even under desperate conditions.\(^\text{11}\)

Those who consciously seek their course between the opposing and complementary attitudes of resistance and surrender, know that in certain circumstances saving your life implies losing it; that saving your mere skin then means losing your entire soul. They know that both their own \(S\)/spirit-self and the future community of human life are most powerfully enhanced and served by acting from a deliberately nonviolent \(ek\)sousia and in the confident acceptance of utter powerlessness. I cannot resist to illustrate this truth with one final example taken from the “Manifesto for denying military service” formulated more than a century ago during the Great War by my distant predecessor as minister of the Hervormde Kerk in Nieuwe Niedorp, Nicolaas J.C. Schermerhorn (1866-1956)\(^\text{12}\). The relevant passage in the manifesto reveals the truly pacifist spirit of its author and runs as follows:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Whenever we will be summoned to defend our country by force of arms, we hope to possess the strength of refusing any direct and personal taking part in it; also to have the strength to undergo detention, or even being executed, rather than being unfaithful to our conscience, our belief, or to what we consider to be the highest laws of common humanity.} \end{align*}
\]

\(^{13}\) Clearly, these examples are of an intensity that transcend the ordinary human scale. What I imply is only to describe the process. The dilemmas and sacrifices in normal life are fortunately not so radical and immediately threatening one’s life. But the process of thoughtlessness, indifference and personal laziness is similar in everyday life. E.g. the mental laziness of a minister or preacher not daring to address a large contributor to his parish whose firm pollutes the environment; or a chemist developing addicting additives for a tobacco company; a software developer masking

\(^\text{11}\) \text{Ibid.}  \\
\(^\text{12}\) Schermerhorn was known as the ‘red’ or ‘socialist’ minister of Niedorp (serving from 1894-1929). He was closely acquainted with Domela Nieuwenhuis, leader of the socialist party. Schermerhorn was active beyond the church on many terrains related to the Socialist movement and the interest of the labouring class, such as prevention of Alcohol abuse and the anti-militaristic movement of non-violence. The latter cause even led to his imprisonment for anti-government instigation, see: Nabrink, \text{Schermerhorn: Vrijheid en Persoonlijkheid}.  \\
\(^\text{13}\) My translation of a quote from “Het Dienstweigeringsmanifest 1915”: \text{Voorzoovelen wij ooit tot gewapende landsverdediging verplicht zouden worden, hopen wij de kracht te bezitten om alle persoonlijke rechtstreeksche deelneming te weigeren, de kracht om liever gevangenisstraf te ondergaan, ja zelfs gefusilleerd te worden, dan ontrouw te plegen aan ons geweten, onze overtuiging, of wat wij de hoogste wetten van algemeene menschelijkheid achten ...}
motorcar emission; a banker selling a financial product, too complicated to understand but probably poisonous; a local politician bargaining away his picturesque town for a prestigious project; shareholders exclusively interested in company profits … Examples are endless an may seem as futile as throwing a shred of plastic from your car window. But only who is not lazy but faithful over little, can be trusted over much (Mt. 25, 21).

11.2 GAINS AND LOSSES OF A NON-THEISTIC CONCEPT OF SIN

In this section I will dwell on the gains (a) and losses (b) of a post- or non-theistic concept of sin.

11.2.a GAIN OF EXPLAINING SIN WITHOUT A GOD

Formally speaking, the advantage of a non-theistic doctrine of sin is simply that it may apply to non-theists, as well as to those Christians referred to above (§11-intro) who say they no longer see God as a person and whom I have designated as “symbolic theists”. The Plantinga concept is perfectly valid for traditional theistic believers in a personal God. But when sin is defined as “affront to a personal God” it is equally clear that non- or post-theists can have neither perception nor acknowledgement of the idea of sin.

The more material meaning or profit of any concept of sin (including a non-theistic one) can be gauged by asking: what actually is lost when the notion of sin disappears from human self-understanding? And my answer is that the loss of a conscious way of dealing with ‘sin’, apart from showing that the connection to a personal Deity is gone, may also reveal that the access to one’s own depth is lost. A sensible and thoughtful concept of sin can help to reopen your own depth. This implies becoming aware of your own true spirit, your essential self, which as guiding principle is helpful to re-think who you really are spiritually; and then to re-collect the responsible outer person you are actually. As means to reconnect with oneself as spirit driven person, a concept of sin can help to take your stand towards two trends in nowadays life: first, the idea that ‘anything goes’ (i); second a trend of ‘depersonalisation’ (ii).

(i) There seems to be an unwritten law in public life suggesting that anything goes. Of course, there is criticism in TV talk-shows when certain excesses occur, such as unrestrained mudslinging, sexting, or hate mail. But the difference between genuinely critical concern or simple entertainment in these programs is hard to tell. Clearly, the rule of ‘anything goes’ depends on what area of society we are in. The worlds of professional sports, of corporate business, E-tech and commerce, all have their own rules and standards. The attribution of top salaries for CEOs follows completely autonomous codes, determined by the unofficial but commonly worshipped deity called ‘the market’. Many workers in the financial world of investment banks are proud to be decidedly “a-moral”, not meaning immoral, but implying “that the terms ‘good’ and ‘evil’ simply have no part in the decision-making process”.14 The aversion of being

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14 Luyendijk, J., Among the Bankers, a journey into the heart of finance, Melville House: Brooklyn/ London 2015, 100: The implication of a-morality is e.g. that a proposal for a certain transaction is not judged by whether it is morally right or wrong, but with respect to the degree of possible “reputation risk”. The inside vocabulary of the financial advisers, lawyers and regulators is intentionally “stripped of terms that could provoke an ethical discussion”. The biggest compliment in the City is ‘professional’. Luyendijk: “It means you do not let emotions get in the way of work, let alone moral beliefs –
labelled as moralist is universal with the effect that individuals can freely implement their own morals on others. The dislike for morality may reveal a repugnance for any deeper or higher authority, in particular when this higher authority is placed beyond or above oneself. In fact, this is one of the motifs that are taken seriously in a non-theistic formulation of sin.

Against ‘anything goes’, it seems vital on the one hand, to maintain one way or the other a sense of trusted authority, a sort of criterion or benchmark, in order to give substance to a spiritual or moral awareness of licet versus non licet, of kosher and not kosher, halal versus haram. On the other hand, in order to keep in touch with actual (non-)religious awareness it is appropriate to seek and localize this authority as nearby as possible, not outside, above, or beyond, but within oneself. Abusing or harming a far away or highly transcendent Deity is not stirring a non-theist’s imagination nor his conscience. What is far away can simply be ignored. But ignoring what is most eminent in yourself is a thing no person with all his senses wants to have part in. This is one of the reasons, to describe sin not as aimed against a God outside of you, but against what is divine inside yourself.

For that matter I acknowledge that the first part of the Plantinga concept, concerning the human part, contains a strong emphasis on the responsibility of the human person in the words personal and culpable. Although I fully agree with this emphasis on the individual human person, I dropped the notion culpability. The religious situation presupposed by Plantinga is an interpersonal relation, namely between the person of the believer and the personal God, whereas in my non-theistic concept the presupposed (religious or) existential situation is an inner relationship within and to oneself.\textsuperscript{15} I am fully aware that speaking of culpability (guilt) to oneself, is certainly not inconceivable. And the absence of belief in a personal God is by no means an automatic protection against guilt feeling. In fact, over against the many exigencies of modern life, many seem to suffer from a sense of failure or falling short, a vague and undefined feeling of guilt. But guilt for what? Is it guilt for not meeting the many commands? for having missed some of the innumerable demands and needs of nowadays life? Or do we basically and perhaps unknowingly feel guilty for the only thing that really matters: namely not really coming to terms with our essence, our true S\textsuperscript{/} spiritual self?

The sad thing in losing ourselves in many trivial concerns might be that we fail in particular the very one concern that could evoke our genuine passion. We do not fail because we do so many bad things, but rather fail to employ what is strong and light in us. A meaningful notion of sin must not embark on trivialities or our weaknesses, but rather address what is strong in us.\textsuperscript{16}

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\textsuperscript{15} This element of immanent or inner opposition is clearly present in all the sources, including Barth with his emphasis on “falling out with one-self” (Auseinandersetzung mit sich selbst) working the demise and death of the old sinner in favour of the exclusive existence of the new human being (7.3.2.c.ii.iii (2)).

\textsuperscript{16} Such was the conviction of Bonhoeffer, Widerstand und Ergebung, 236 (letter on July, 8th 1944), demanding with regard to the autonomy of the emancipated world (die Mündige Welt), “daß man den Menschen in seiner Weltlichkeit nicht ’mädig macht’, sonder ihn an seiner stärksten Stelle mit Gott konfrontiert ...”. Further 235: “Nicht die Sünden der Schwäche, sonder die starken Sünden sind es, um...
In this light, the notion of laziness is both criticising and potentially motivating. It tells us that something is wrong, while simultaneously assuming and exhorting the potential to transform ourselves as S/spirit carrying persons, to recollect and concentrate our life choosing acts and targets that really belong to our essential S/spirit-self and fit with the person we are.

(ii) The second trend, namely of ‘depersonalisation’ motivates my plea for a rehabilitation of the outer ego person. In present society there is on the one hand, a strong leaning towards privacy and hiding in anonymity. People fulfil their jobs, but when the office closes, the individual employee moves back from the public and hides out in private. Strangely enough, on the other hand an equally highly prized value is an ever wider-stretched freedom of speech which seems to be at odds with the hang towards privacy. But then, the almost unlimited freedom of speech is counterbalanced again by a sort of common agreement that no one has the right to judge anybody else personally. This means that, according to freedom of speech, it is acceptable to humiliate, disgrace or shame other persons’ opinion, belief, way of life etc., as long as one does not make it personal. As if one’s opinion, belief etc. are not eo ipso personal! And this seems to run parallel to a correlating tendency to exclude and evade personal responsibility. In large areas of common service, healthcare and insurance, decisions are preconceived and determined by impersonal structures, protocols and algorithms, rather than by self-thinking responsible persons. No one is ever to blame as long as they have correctly – professionally! – applied the rules and followed the regulations. Thus, the individual person does not need to take personal responsibility, he becomes a cog in the machinery of the system. Now although I would like to counterbalance both the trends (‘anything goes’ and ‘depersonalisation’), I must admit that my concept does meet both of them only half-way, which brings me to the loss or minus side.

11.2.b Loss or limitation of a concept without God

In reaction to ‘anything goes’ and the dispersion or even ‘burning out’ of life that goes with it, concentration on your spiritual self by actively seeking what is your essential concern will obviously have the effect of a strong curtailment of many minor concerns and causes that may have overflooded your life. So, one who feels tackled and perhaps even appealed by the explanation of sin as ‘denial of his/her spiritual self’, may shake off his/her psycho-physical laziness, skip a dozen of things from the daily agenda, quit Facebook, and concentrate on what really matters. But this still leaves open the question: concentrate on what?! Clearly, this depends on personal choice and freedom but inevitably evokes the question mentioned above, of a criterion or benchmark. This brings us back to the essential question of the identity of the spirit (or Spirit) that informs and indwells one as one’s personal spirit-self (10.4.b.ii). What or who is the spirit that inspires you? Actually, one whose highest spiritual cause it is to pursue as many wealth and riches as possible, and therefore excludes from his mind all social and ethical rules of reckoning with others that might limit his goal, and prides himself on 70 to 80 working hours a week etc. etc.: such a person can perfectly

\[ \text{die es geht}. \] As example of such “strong sins”, Bonhoeffer points a.o. to “the reluctance (or fear) of a citizen to take responsibility” (235f: “beim Bürger: die Scheu vor der freien Verantwortung.”. For a further discussion of this aspect of Bonhoeffer’s concept of sin, see De Boer, \textit{Het zondebegrip bij Dietrich Bonhoeffer}, esp. 141, 149ff.
agree with my formulation of sin, since he is far from lazy and highly concentrated on his personal spirit inspiring his life with its essential principle which is: striving for wealth, success, personal realization.¹⁷

So the identity of the inspiring spirit is of decisive importance. Now, the search for ultimate truth and for the revelation of ultimate spirit is as long as history. Many times in history, humans have thought final reality would be found in their own time, that the day was nigh. Perhaps Jesus was one of them, and Paul, and Hegel. Adherents to the New Age *sensu stricto* in the early 1960s certainly thought that the old world had come to an end and a new Age was at hand (2.1.1.a). More recently, when the Berlin Wall collapsed and the Iron Curtain was torn down, “The end of history?” was more or less suggested by Fukuyama, stating that Western liberal democracy would now prove to be “the final form of human government”. A reaction came from his former teacher Huntington also putting a question mark behind the title of his lecture: “The Clash of Civilizations?” (1992). Huntington stated that, instead of having come to an end, history will rather be driven forth by the conflicts between cultural and religious identities.¹⁸ The developments since 9/11 seem to indicate that Huntington had better put an exclamation mark behind his thesis. Nevertheless, I want to suggest a thesis that runs deeper.

Without denying the clash between cultures and religions, in which religion is often used to inflame conflicts instead of cooling them down, I will suggest still another dividing line, a ‘clash’ cutting right through the middle of all cultures and religions as such. When finishing the first draft of my manuscript (2018) there was a global political clash developing rapidly, not about democracy, neither about culture or religion, but most basically about money and trade. The division line was not only between the USA and China but cut right through the nations belonging to the Western civilization as well. After some decades of globalism, a forgotten type of war, namely a Trade War was rapidly spreading over the world. But once again, I want to dig a decisive slice deeper, since the financial frontline lies not only and not even primarily between countries. The really antagonistic cleavage runs between groups of ordinary people and was analysed some years ago by Thomas Piketty as the ever growing inequality of ‘wealth and income’ which pervades all nations, cultures, religions.¹⁹ If Piketty is correct in his analysis as well as in his warning for the consequences (such as massive migration, societies torn apart, civil wars and tensions), then the origin of the problem literally transcends not only nations and cultures but even religions. The real clash then proves to be a spiritual one, going on between two gods, two spirits that both

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¹⁷ In fact, he may also have his inspiring scriptures, like e.g., Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, also offering messianic role models like the ideal man John Galt, the inventor of Atlantis, or his closest friend and disciple, Hank Reardon. Their leading spirit inspires them to confessions like: “I swear by my life and my love of it that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine”. This belief leads them (as prime-movers) to refuse any corroboration with the lazy and the incompetent: “We are on strike against those who believe that one man must exist for the sake of another (…) our terms are a moral code which holds that man is an end in himself and not the means to any end of others”, cited from: *Atlas Shrugged*, Part III, chapter I: Atlantis.


¹⁹ Piketty, Th., *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2013); translation of the French original: *Le Capital au XXIe siècle*. Piketty’s analysis of wealth concentration and distribution shows that the division between rich and poor, between have’s and have not’s has been growing during the past 250 years.
inspire people: one of humanism and the bible, the other of money and power; one more intent on the inner side of existence, whereas the outer side of life is aimed at by the other. A clash between God and Mammon.

But alas!, this analysis of mine, is badly outdated, given my own post- or non-theistic concept of sin. Me too, I am hopelessly inconsistent. Using the name and notion of a personal God as well as designating the unlimited cumulation of wealth as the religion of the Mammon, both are no longer allowed in a non-theistic context. Some will say that nothing is lost with this, since after all, neither God nor Mammon does really exist. But there still is a different loss, namely the loss of symbolic imagination. In the final section I will try to amend that loss.

### 11.3 Clarifying some inconsistencies

How can I suddenly come up with God, together even with his counterpart Mammon? The answer is what I mean with ‘symbolic theism’. Actually, when I consciously think, that is, when dwelling in my head, I am a symbolic theist; when I just ‘am’ which is nearer to my heart, I am no different from a theist. For a traditional theist it may seem unlikely to have a solid and even substantial faith based upon a symbolic God. But most theists are capable of more symbolism than they realize. Practically all they say about God is symbolic: the hand of God e.g., that never fails, and can slay a human person, as well as carry him through the waters. But the idea that the notion ‘God’ itself is a symbol is simply a bridge too far for most of them. On the other hand, genuine, hardboiled non-theists will most likely turn up their nose with respect to the symbol believer. But even a determined a-theist sometimes has his inconsistencies.

In one of his novels, Graham Greene tells the story of an author named Bendrix having an affair with Sarah who is married to another man. After some time, Sara becomes more reluctant, and Bendrix gets suspicious about Sara’s loyalty to him. Occasionally she goes into town alone. He has her shadowed and discovers that Sara goes to Church, having talks with a priest, which finally brings her to return to her husband. When all this becomes clear to the deliberate a-theist Bendrix, he felt an anger coming up in his mind and he thought by himself: “I hated God, as though he existed”.

Apparently, symbolic theism can be hard to suppress. Therefore, I will explain how it can work in religious experience and then wind up my journey with a final reference to the title: Sin, against whom or against what?

What I mean by symbolic theism is based on Tillich’s extensive application of symbolism. As the symbol ‘Father in heaven’ refers to God, so “God” is the person-like symbol through which we address what is ultimately important to us. Saying “God” in worship and prayer, then, is a way of reaching out in a personal-relational way to what is represented through the symbol ‘God’, namely the unconditional element in all creation, appearing as what becomes the ultimate concern in one’s life. If we consciously accept Tillich’s symbolism, religious practices such as worship and prayer become forms of earnest symbolic role-playing: religion as the age-old attempt to interact with what concerns one ultimately. Within this religious symbolic ‘play’, God is for sure a person and real sin is, symbolically speaking, a culpable and responsible affront to him. Surely, all this is as real as it is played. And even more than

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any usual play, religion must be played seriously and honestly. Just as one should be honest to one’s own spirit.

It seems to me that ‘earnest symbolic role-playing’ comes very close to what the Dutch essayist and novelist Frans Kellendonk (1951-1990) designated as “oprecht veinzen” which can be translated as: ‘honest simulating’ or ‘sincere pretence’. Kellendonk’s background question was both epistemic and ontological: how to deal with the “unknown”? which he paralleled with the religious question for “god”, or the philosophic-ontological search for “reality”21. The easy pretension of self-possessed realism (be it in science, art, religion or philosophy) is the illusory idea that we can simply “know” reality as it really is, as a collection of facts so to speak. But actually, said Kellendonk, all human endeavours to really ‘know’ are attempts that find at most imperfect homes in the mystery that “reality” is. Scientific conceptions, artistic images, and metaphysical-theological symbols are only tries to build dwelling places in the unfamiliar territory of unidentified “reality” with the intention to somehow cope with the unknown. But when we present these efforts as claims that offer unquestionable face-to-face knowledge of what reality is, we overlay our hand. The second ‘word’ of the Decalogue is precisely precluding such claims,22 according to Kellendonk, even though we cannot refrain from the attempts. Thus, we keep trying to imagine ourselves images of being itself, or of beauty or God, since only a purely self-forgetting mystic could perhaps communicate directly with the mystery that true reality is, but ordinary mortals can only approach it through images and symbols.23 When we apply them, we pretend to know what we talk about. But at the same time, we never forget that we only act, think and speak as if we know. This is what Kellendonk called “sincere pretence” (oprecht veinzen).24 The images, concepts, and symbols we employ to deal with the unknown ‘reality’ - being itself, ultimate beauty, God! - are simultaneously true and false, they are affirmed and must be negated, not unlike Tillich’s “paradoxical concepts” (8.1.1.d) and “symbols” (8.1.1.e). Making theological affirmations that subsequently must be denied is also part of so called apophatic theology as attributed to some extent to Augustine (1.1.1).25 With respect to changing personal beliefs and practices in church and society, the attitude of sincere pretence (oprecht veinzen) and serious play in the symbolic universe of faith, deserves more discussion and systematic attention than it has actually received.26

21 See the essay “Idolen, over het tweede gebod”, in: Kellendonk, Het complete werk, 847-860. References in the main text to page numbers in: Het complete werk.
22 Kellendonk, o.c., 851; 852.
23 Kellendonk, o.c., 857.
24 Kellendonk presented his definition as form of “irony” of which he himself admitted that it was not so adequate (Kellendonk, 858f. bij gebrek aan een beter woord ...). He explained irony as an attitude to counter not-knowing (een houding van “tegen niet-weten in), and this aspect is precisely what I have described in the main text. Usually, irony has a further connotation of funny mockery, a humorous or mildly sardonic style of consciously suggesting or saying the opposite of what one really thinks is true. This connotation is not part of sincere pretence (oprecht veinzen).
26 Three serious references to Kellendonk’s trouvaille that I know of are, firstly, Ch.de Cloet e.a. (ed.), ‘Oprecht Veinzen Over Franz Kellendonk, Amsterdam/Den Haag 1998, edited as Schrijversprentenboek 43, containing contributions from the literary and editorial circles he had been part of. Two contributions in particular deal with Oprecht veinzen as religious attitude (see the second following note). Secondly, Kellendonk drew attention from the side of systematic theology, see: Brinkman, Het drama van de menselijke vrijheid, 37ff. Brinkman describes Kellendonk as representing a receptive and searching at-
Obviously, there is intrinsic thematic affinity with the notion “second naïveté” coined by Ricoeur. Something of the “distress of modernity” intuited by the Frenchman concerning the loss of the spontaneity of pre-critical immediate belief, was also present in Kellendonk. Ricoeur felt that “beyond the desert of criticism, we wish to be called again. With this, he did not mean going back to primitive naïveté, since the old myths are no longer valid “as explanation”, but they can be restored and receive a new interpretation as symbols. Thus, what Ricoeur aimed at with “second naïveté” was “to be the postcritical equivalent of the pre-critical hierophany.” In the Netherlands, the theme was introduced by Han Fortmann and Okke Jager.

The themes - Oprecht veinzen, godly play, second naïveté – that are actually modes of symbolic imagination, can be particularly relevant with regard to those who find it difficult to see God as person, former theists, now full of hesitation. They have become rationalistically disinclined to accept the existence of a separate divine being or personal God, but they are nevertheless not un-religious. Instead, they may intentionally strive to remain Christian or even try to return to liturgy and religious community. For thus disposed persons, the concept of ‘sincere pretence’ can help to articulate, if not their belief then their religious yen or desire without giving up intellectual integrity. Participating in liturgy and worship, and engaging even in a personal relationship to a personal God as in prayer, can be tried in a mood of honest and serious role-playing or honest hypocrisy.


28 See Kellendonk, Het complete werk, 721, where he refers to “both the necessity and the impossibility to have faith” (“zowel de noodzaak als de onmogelijkheid om te geloven”); see for Kellendonk’s struggle with religion: Van Tongeren, “Ironie en verlangen”, in: De Cloet e.a., Oprecht veinzen, 55-64.

29 Ricoeur, o.c., 349; 351.

30 Ricoeur, o.c., 350; 352.

31 See Jager, Geloven wordt onwennig. Naar een tweede primitiviteit?

32 See: Versnel, Coping with the gods, 486; Versnel points to the fact that the Greek word ‘hypocrates means actor (as in a theatre), on the one hand, and dissembler, pretender or hypocrite on the other, thus localizing his discussion of religious cults within the context of theatrical performance. As Versnel explains, both actors and participants (not only in a theatre but also in religious ritual like the ruler cult) have only two options: “either to fully (and sincerely) pretend or to break the rules of the game. The first option entails the condition that the spectator is willing to accept emotional involvement in the spectacle. He should ‘surrender’ to the ‘reality’ of fiction. This means that he must abandon the attitude of the distanced ‘onlooker’ and adopt the involvement of the ‘theatreregoer’. The point he wants to make is to acknowledge and recognize what he calls “the theatrical and performative nature of ritual” (486f).
It is possible, I think, that this approach might even be approved by those who themselves rather stick to a more solid, traditional belief. But such agreement to disagree is never a matter of course, which can be illustrated with the spiritually unbending rejection of ‘sincere pretence’ by a friend and colleague of Kellendonk, the Dutch writer Oek de Jong. De Jong, who once left the Protestant-Reformed belief of his youth considering it hopelessly outdated and intellectually passé, emphatically denounced Kellendonk’s idea as an “intellectual construction”, devised to maintain God but at the expense of changing faith into what it is not, since

(...) belief, which formerly was without proof taking the existence of a transcendent and unknowable God to be true, is changed in ‘consciously and intentionally believing in fictions’ of which God is one. That’s what he calls oprecht veinzen.33

For De Jong, so it seems, faith and belief should forever retain the despised form that once crystallized in himself: “without proof taking … to be true”. One can hardly evade the impression that Kellendonk’s alternative form is non licei to him, not despite but because it no longer carries those crude claims of old-time objectivism. Those who once have left their commitment in common faith and Church often prove to be remarkably ‘traditional’ in their views on what faith and Church should be and ever remain.

More affinity with oprecht veinzen can be felt in the spiritual attitude of still another Dutch intellectual-writer, Stephan Sanders. For some years now, and within a thoroughly secularized habitat, Sanders is trying the spiritual move towards religion and faith: going to church again, attending ecclesial liturgy. Describing his project in a newspaper interview, he commented as follows:

Once in a while I say ‘God’ to practice. I pronounce the word in order to see if I can say it without having to giggle. But I’m not frequently saying ‘God’, which is what I value in the Jewish tradition never using the Name. (…) Even then, speaking out, becomes speaking to God as well, to the good listener, the one who understands, and is not inclined to have me falter, but ready to lend his ear in mercy. One inadvertently returns to such ancient words since they are proven”.34

These are thoughtful words, wise and gentle, that may even suggest an answer to the question of sin: against whom or against what? Whether one is more inclined to “whom” or rather to “what” depends perhaps on little more than whether one is a frequent speaker of the name and word “God”; or whether one is more reticent on that. In both cases, the question of sin is a matter of being really honest to your spiritual self, either in face of the “Good Listener who understands”, or in face of only yourself. In the latter case, be sure and do your best to be as good and understanding a listener as the Eternal!

Summary

This work concerns changes in the doctrine of sin in which the following traditional understanding of sin is taken as our starting point: sin is ‘a culpable and personal affront to a personal God’ (C. Plantinga, Jr.). Sin refers to ‘evil’ in the religious relationship with God. The study examines the consequences for the doctrine of sin when God is no longer seen as person but rather as spiritual principle (something divine, spirit, higher law etc.). It finally aims at the formulation of a post- or non-theistic concept of sin.

1. Introduction

In Western Christianity (Europe, North America), the doctrine and understanding of sin reached a crisis in the second half of the twentieth century. This crisis was stimulated by at least three developments. One was a steady change in religious experience among many Christians, which entailed a shift from a traditional theistic concept of a personal God to a more en-theistic idea of God or the ‘divine’ as an immanent principle, as force or spirit. This has consequences for the more traditional doctrine and experience of sin.

A second development, more directly connected to the theme of sin, was boosted by the theological critique of the doctrine of (original) sin. This was first done by Catholic theologians after Vatican II, but they were quickly followed by Protestants. The critique was connected with the experience of believers – ‘we are not that bad!’ – and found an echo in the liturgy. In the new service book of prayers (1998) for the Protestant liturgy in the Netherlands, the weekly confession of sin was either toned down or largely replaced by the kyrie. The previous confession of common and personal sin was transformed in many cases into an understanding of tragedy and of the imperfect world, as well as of human powerlessness over against the ‘powers’ of evil. ‘Forgive us our sins’ changed into: ‘Lord, have mercy with those who suffer’. The notion ‘sin’ retreated more and more to the background.

This study focuses, however, on a third development more outside official Christianity, namely, the movement since the 1970s that has become known as New Age. The label ‘New Age’ can cover a wide range of movements and activities, but with respect to the doctrine of sin, there are two motifs/ideals deeply embedded in the New Age movement that are important. The first is the inclination to relate God and the human being, or, rather, the divine and what is essentially human, very closely, often extending to an ontological identification. Second, New Age contains a strong positive understanding and high expectations of human potential. Based on these two ideals, there often is (or was) in New Age a twofold reproach of institutionalized Christian faith, namely, that God and human beings were separated and placed over against each other in an antagonistic relationship and that the traditional doctrine of sin led to the neglect of human potential. This double reproach, which was explicitly or implicitly almost universally found in New Age authors, constitutes the starting point for the initial ‘working’ or ‘research’ question for this study. This question is whether

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1 Adopted in the Dutch Reformed Church of the Netherlands (Nederlands Hervormde Kerk) as well as in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland). These two ecclesial institutions are joined since 2004 as the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (Protestants Kerk in Nederland - PKN).
this double reproach obtains for two important and more or less complementary theologians of the previous century, i.e., Karl Barth and Paul Tillich.

2. **Motivations for this study**

This initial working question is not the real goal nor my most profound motivation for this study. It is almost clear from the start that Barth’s thinking is further removed from New Age spirituality than Tillich’s. Our working question allows us to think systematically about the doctrine of sin and accompanying questions. Here the question of the concept of the human being (anthropology), the concept of God (theology/concept of God), and how those two can be the basis for thinking about the God-human being relationship (religion or spirituality) come together. As far as human relations are concerned, it is when there are problems or when the relationship is under pressure that these issues are thought about most deeply and we discover the most about that relation. As far as the religious relation and experience is concerned, one must then turn to the doctrine of sin.

My actual motivation to discuss sin is the fact that this old concept allows a depth dimension of being human to be broached that not only includes more than what is morally good/bad, or, in legal terms, what is/is not allowed but also goes further than believing/not believing in a personal God. From the perspective of the history of religion, the concept of sin has to do with the concept of ‘taboo’, with the distinction between clean/unclean, sacred/profane, saving or selling one’s soul. Sin has to do with a personal-spiritual boundary that does not automatically coincide with ethics or juridical law. It concerns a far-reaching boundary that, as a human being, one simply has to transgress or absolutely not, at penalty of ...? It is precisely here that the most important associations and questions concerning the concept of sin are indicated, namely, which important ‘boundary’ is understood here? And what are the consequences if that crucial boundary is respected or not respected? The first question in particular can be heard in the title of this work, i.e., *Sin: Against Whom or against What?*

3. **Research**

The suggestion above – that sin is not the same as believing/not believing in a personal God – deviates implicitly from the definition that is taken as our starting point but is one of the results/conclusions of this study. To arrive at that point, we proceed as follows.

With Plantinga’s formula as our reference point, we explore three New Age sources: Jane Roberts (the so-called Seth-books), *A Course in Miracles*, and the work of the former Dominican friar/priest Matthew Fox. Their thinking about the relationship ‘human beings-God-world’ is explored from three mutually dependent perspectives, i.e., *cosmology* (the God-human being relationship), *hamartiology* (their view of sin and evil), *human potential* (their view of the possibilities of human self-realisation). Our fundamental question figures into all three perspectives and is researched via sub-questions like: How do they conceive of the unity between God and human beings? Is something like sin recognized or denied? Is there something resembling original sin (*non posse*) or is there simply an emphasis on ‘human potential’? Is ‘evil’ simply denied? Further questions concern both partners in the sin relation: How is the human ‘person’ viewed? Is God also seen as a person?
The theologians are studied according to the same method. The data we gather regarding the questions we formulated are arranged in an inventory table.

4. OBJECTIVE

The above discussion is followed by a dialogue, an exchange, and comparison of the various ideas and perceptions of all five sources, with special attention paid to underlying motifs. The objective is to arrive at my own assessment of and choice regarding the various views or parts of them so that I can present a new formulation of sin that is not dependent on belief in a personal God. In short, the objective is to arrive at a non-theistic concept of sin that can speak to non-theistic believers and even possibly to people who call themselves atheists and yet want to be religious.

5. A FEW FINDINGS AND COMPLICATIONS

Our explorations show that the explicitly theistic concept of sin that is taken as our reference point is not (completely) shared by any of the sources. Even in Barth, sin as sloth is not directly related to God himself but to the true humanity that we have in Jesus Christ. Sin as sloth (Trägheit), then, is lagging behind who we already are in Christ.

For Tillich (who does not take an entirely different line on this), sin is primarily alienation from whom we essentially are. He locates the cause for this largely outside and partly within the human being because, for him, being human is realized, among other things, between two poles: destiny and limited freedom – one could say between a greater embedding power and one’s own responsibility. Tillich distances himself explicitly from the theistic concept of God, speaking instead of the ‘absolute unconditioned’ that is unleashing the ultimate concern of human beings. Nevertheless, Tillich can continue to speak in the same way about God on the basis of his doctrine of symbols. The personal God is the highest conceivable symbol of what addresses us absolutely. Seen in that way, Tillich’s type of religion can be labelled symbolic theism.

In the New Age sources, theism is completely replaced by pan-en-theism or cosmicotheism (Roberts, Fox) or by a-cosmic pan-theism (A Course in Miracles). According to ACiM, and, with some reservations also Roberts, there is only one reality, namely, the one divine or spiritual reality that is manifested in units of creative awareness. In Roberts, these units are connected in networks, and the broader and more extensive the network the closer people approach the ‘All-That-Is), which is Roberts’ equivalent for God, a kind of total consciousness but one that each partial consciousness is a part of. In ACiM all human ‘minds’ are seen as extensions of God that, together with their divine origin, constitute one unbroken, pure spiritual ‘brotherhood’.

What is important in both faith systems is, that there is nothing that portrays God and the human being in opposition to each other or any kind of dualism. Nor can there be. On the one hand, in both there is no separate divine person or entity against whom or what something evil can be done or thought to be done. “There is no personal God-individual,” according to Roberts. On the other hand, there is also no identifiable, individual human person who can be referred to as an agent. One’s spiritual, essential self, i.e., one’s true identity – is divine, whereas one’s limited, outward ego-self is not even a fraction of who one truly is. In both approaches, the meaning of evil or sin is weakened or shown to be either illusion (A Course in Miracles), or extremely limited (un)wiseness (Roberts).
Fox is a remarkable exception. He is just as assertive in his rejection of theism as he is in his rejection of original sin. Through his radical rejection of the doctrine of original sin and the accompanying Fall/Redemption tradition, he became famous for his provocative book *Original Blessing* (1983). But this does not mean that Fox just denies the reality of sin. To the contrary, sin committed by people is the only evil he acknowledges as evil (in contrast to, for example, nature, which, in Fox, cannot do any evil even via the worst natural disasters). Unlike Roberts and *A Course in Miracles*, Fox thus does certainly acknowledge an apparent, responsible human person as an agent of sin, but this (sinful, religious) evil is directed primarily against the created world, not against a God in the theistic sense. Can it then be called sin – as Plantinga defines it – as *anti-Deum* (in whatever way)? The answer to this is ‘Yes’, for, in Fox’s view, the world is called to life through God’s eternal Word (*Dabar*) or by the Cosmic Christ and remains an inspired creation of God. Fox (a former Catholic) sees all of creation as a ‘sacrament’ and opts for an undiluted pan-en-theism or *cosmo*-theism, whereby an offense against creation is also an offense against God. For Fox, sin is not respecting, not co-creating, or not joining in celebration and giving birth again to the mystical interior of created reality.

6. **THE PROBLEM OF COMMENSURABILITY**

When attempting to take stock, the following problem emerges: To what extent is it at all possible to compare these different and divergent views with each other or to conduct a meaningful conversation about them, both theologically and anthropologically?

Remarkably enough, the greatest differences do not appear to be theological in nature, for they do not concern the possible object of sin – against whom or what sin is directed. All five sources hold to a transcendent or however described divine or spiritual reality that must at least be affirmed. At the same time, this higher reality is localized by all (!) within the lower or external reality, thus as a form of ‘immanent transcendence’. This is true even of Barth, with the restriction that, in accordance with his doctrine of *en/an-hypostasis*, it is exclusively concentrated in Jesus, namely, as God’s eternal Word (Christ) in the man (Jesus).

In contrast to the theological differences, the anthropological differences are more difficult and diverse. For Roberts, individual identity is completely impalpable: who a human being is does not in any case lie in the externally visible ego-person. In *A Course in Miracles*, each form of separation is seen as an illusion. That already entails the exclusion of the idea that a human being can act in a hostile way or even with a certain distance over against another human being or God. According to *A Course in Miracles*, there is only one harmonious, monistic reality of spiritual brotherhood, and the rest is illusion. The type of miracle that *A Course* wishes to teach its followers – particularly the miracle of forgiveness – is to continue to see a seeming aggressor as what he truly is, namely, a brother and nothing else.

Barth saw the individual person as highly responsible and capable with respect to his/her sinful sloth. But, conversely, other than Jesus Christ, Barth does not acknowledge any responsible person endowed with the ‘human potential’ to actively do the good and to realize true humanity in his own life. In a certain sense, Barth sees the sinful half as the whole human person. Only Tillich, in a limited sense (limited freedom), and, more strongly, Fox see the human being as an identifiably responsible person with ‘potential’ for good or evil.
In order to gain some kind of foothold and clarity in the midst of all these anthropological distinctions, it seemed meaningful to explore the most important historical concepts of person, if only for the purposes of orientation as well as in the hope of finding an anthropology to which as many different aspects as possible from the sources researched can be connected. Such a doctrine of the ‘human being’ or ‘person’ has to connect at least two aspects:
First, in accordance with all five sources, if only partially with respect to Barth:
1. Who or what is sinned against (the transcendent, God, spirit, higher principle, something absolute ...) must have a place within the anthropology
Second, over against Roberts and ACIM, and partly over against Barth:
2. There must be a somehow discernible individual in this anthropological doctrine, i.e., a human being with a personal identity, who is demonstrably accountable and responsible as a possible subject of both good and evil.

7. Scheler’s Concept of Humankind
In the research into and comparison of important concepts of the person, the metaphysical anthropology of Max Scheler emerged as a surprise, for it was unexpectedly useful for several reasons. First, there is a structural correspondence with the sources, namely, in the acknowledgement of two layers in the human being. Second, Scheler does harmonize his view of the human person with other sciences, particularly biological-evolutionary insights, without taking them over uncritically. Third, Scheler’s concept of person can also be used in a Christian theological view of being human, as well as with a more humanistic metaphysical approach. According to Scheler, on the one hand, the human being is connected with the animal kingdom (the human person is one of them), but, unlike the animals, the human being is above all gifted with a principle from elsewhere. Scheler derives this principle first from God and later from the ground of being. It is this principle from elsewhere, called ‘S/spirit (Geist)’ by Scheler, that makes the human ‘animal’ a human person. In other words, the psychological-physical phenomenon human becomes the finite person-center in whom the principle ‘S/spirit’ appears and through whom this principle is represented. The advantage of Scheler’s view is, in brief, that the ‘spirit-based human person’ is drawn as the place of encounter where two dimensions come together: God and creation, or the spiritual and the physical world, the absolute and the conditioned, the inner self and the outer ego. Wherever these two dimensions converge, sparks happen, which sometimes leads to a short circuit (sin) or to the shining of benevolent light (doing good).

8. A Reformulation of the Concept of Sin
In part IV of the study, the announced assessment (see 4. Objective) of the various views of the sources is carried out, and a choice is made between elements from those sources. That’s where Scheler’s concept of person is used as a guiding principle (§ 11). In the concluding section (§ 12), the choices and conclusions are used to arrive at a post- or non-theistic doctrine of sin:

Sin is S/self denial through personal sloth or laziness;
It implies: neglecting and forgetting my own essential S/spirit, my very human self.
Various aspects from or in reaction to the sources return here:

1. ‘spirit’ as immanent transcendence (in accordance with all sources)
2. God and the human being can both be conceived in the concept ‘spirit’
   (‘spirit’ instead of ‘personal’ as a connecting concept between the divine and
   the human)
3. the element of opposition (Barth), but not over against an instance that is
   distant or found outside the concrete individual but over against something
   (transcendent) in oneself (Roberts, *A Course in Miracles*, Fox, Tillich)
4. the element of an accountable, responsible human person, the rehabilitation of
   the ego (contra Roberts, *A Course in Miracles*)
5. sin as sloth (Barth, Fox) and as alienation (Tillich)

The advantages and disadvantages of this non-theistic concept are also briefly
discussed in this concluding chapter.
Samenvatting:
Zonde: tegen Wie of tegen Wat? (tegen Iemand of tegen Iets?)
Een afweging van de visies van Barth en Tillich op zonde en heiliging, in vergelijking met de visies van enkele New Age auteurs

Deze studie gaat over veranderingen van de zondeleer waarbij de volgende, traditionele voorstelling van zonde als vertrekpunt is genomen: zonde is ‘een schuldige en persoonlijke belediging van een persoonlijke God’ (a culpable and personal affront to a personal God - C.Plantinga jr.). Zonde wijst op ‘kwaad’ in de religieuze relatie met God. De studie onderzoekt de consequenties voor het zondebegrip als God niet theïstisch als persoon wordt gezien, maar als ‘geestelijk principe” (het goddelijke, geest, iets). De studie loopt uit op de formulering van een post- of niet-theistisch zondebegrip.

1. INLEIDING
In het Westere Christendom (Europa, Noord Amerika) zijn de zondeleer en het zondebesef in de tweede helft van de vorige eeuw in een crisis geraakt, hetgeen werd bevorderd door tenminste drie ontwikkelingen. Eén daarvan is een gestage verandering in religieuze ervaring onder veel Christenen, waarbij men van een traditioneel theïstisch beeld van een persoonlijke God verschuift naar een meer en-theïstische voorstelling van God of het ‘goddelijke’ als een immanent principe, als kracht of geest. Dit moet wel gevolgen hebben voor de meer traditionele leer en ervaring van zonde.

Een tweede ontwikkeling, in meer direct verband met het thema zonde, werd aangezwengeld door theologische kritiek op de (erf)zondeleer, eerst vooral door Katholieke theologen na Vaticanum II, maar spoedig ook door Protestantse. De kritiek sloot aan bij de beleving van gelovigen - “zo slecht zijn we toch niet?!?” en vond weerklank in de liturgie. In de Protestantse liturgie in Nederland (van de NHK & GK, nu PKN) werd de wekelijkse zondebelijdenis, hetzij afgezwakt, hetzij grotendeels vervangen door het Kyriegebed. De voordien ook op de eigen persoon gerichte schuldbelijdenis transformeerde in vele gevallen naar een besef van tragiek en van het onvolmaakte, alsook van een zekere machteloosheid onder de ‘machten’: vandaar Heer ontferm u. Het begrip en woord ‘zonde’ raakte meer en meer op de achtergrond.

De studie zoomt echter vooral in op een derde ontwikkeling meer buiten het officiële Christendom, namelijk op de beweging die bekend werd onder de naam New Age vanaf de jaren ‘70. Onder het label ‘New Age’ kan heel veel worden verstaan, maar met betrekking tot de zondeleer, zijn twee diep in de New Age beweging gewortelde motieven/idealen van belang. Het eerste is de neiging om God en mens, of liever het goddelijke en het essentieel menselijke zeer nauw op elkaar te betrekken, veelal tot aan ontologische identificatie toe. Ten tweede bestaat er binnen de New Age een sterk positief besef en hoge verwachting van het menselijk tegoed of ‘potentieel’ (human potential). Vanuit deze twee idealen heeft (of had) men in de New Age vaak een tweevoedig verwijt richting het institutionele of officiële Christelijk geloof, nl. dat men daar God en mens uit elkaar en antagonistisch tegenover elkaar plaatst; en bovendien dat vanuit de traditionele zondeleer het menselijk tegoed wordt veronachtzaamd. Dit dubbelverwijt, dat expliciet of impliciet vrijwel algemeen bij
New Age auteurs aanwezig is, vormt het uitgangspunt voor de algemene ‘werk’- of ‘onderzoek’-vraag van de studie. Deze vraag is: of het genoemde dubbelverwijt klopt met betrekking tot twee belangrijke en min of meer complementaire theolen van de vorige eeuw, te weten Barth en Tillich.

2. Motief

De werk-vraag is niet het echte doel, noch het diepste motief van de studie. Op voorhand laat zich bijna wel raden dat het denken van Barth verder van de New Age spiritualiteit afstaat dan dat van Tillich. De werkvraag dient om systematisch over de zondeleer en daarmee samenhangende vragen na te denken. Daarbij komen samen: de vraag hoe gedacht wordt over de mens (antropologie), hoe over God (theologie/godsbeeld), en hoe van daaruit gedacht kan worden over de god-menselijke relatie (religie/spiritualiteit). Wat menselijke relaties en ervaring betreft: daarover wordt doorgaans het diepst nagedacht en het meeste ontdekt als er problemen zijn of wanneer de relatie onder druk staat, wat betreft de religieuze relatie en ervaring daarvan moet je dan dus bij de zondeleer zijn.

Het eigenlijke motief om het over zonde te hebben is de overweging dat met dit oude begrip een dieptedimensie van mens-zijn wordt aangesneden, die niet alleen meer omvat dan moreel goed/fout; of juridisch dit mag wel/dat mag niet, maar die ook verder gaat dan geloof/ongeloof in een persoonlijke God. Het begrip zonde heeft godsdienst-historisch gezien te maken met het begrip ‘tabu’, met het verschil rein/onrein, heilig/profaan, je ziel bewaren of verkopen. Zonde heeft te maken met een persoonlijk-spirituele grens, die niet automatisch samenvalt met ethiek of juridisch recht. Het betreft een verder strekkende grens, die je als mens juist wel of absoluut niet moet overschrijden op straffe van … ?

Precies hiermee zijn de belangrijkste associaties en vragen i.v.m. het begrip zonde aangeduid: nl. welke belangrijke “grens” bedoel je? En: wat zijn de consequenties als je die cruciale grens wel of niet respecteert? Met name de eerstgenoemde vraag klinkt door in de titel van het onderzoek die neerkomt op Zonde tegen Iemand of tegen Iets? (Sin: against Whom or against What?).

3. Onderzoek

Wat in het voorbijgaan werd gesuggereerd – dat zonde zelfs niet gelijk staat aan wel/niet geloven in persoonlijke God – wijkt impliciet af van de definitie van zonde die als uitgangspunt is genomen, maar is één van de resultaten/conclusies van het onderzoek.

Om daar te komen wordt de volgende koers gevolgd.

Met Plantinga’s formule als referentiepunt worden eerst drie geselecteerde New Age bronnen bestudeerd: Jane Roberts (de zgn. Seth-boeken), A Course in Miracles (ACiM) en het werk van de van oorsprong Dominicaanse broeder/priester Matthew Fox. Hun denken over de relatie mens-God-wereld wordt verkend vanuit drie onderling samenhangende gezichtspunten, te weten: Cosmologie (verhouding God-mens), Hamartiologie (hun denken over zonde en kwaad), Human Potential (hun denken over mogelijkheden van menselijke zelf-verwerkliking). Het thema ‘zonde’ speelt mee onder alle drie gezichtspunten en wordt onderzocht aan de hand van vragen als: Hoe wordt gedacht over god-menselijke eenheid? Wordt zoiets als zonde erkend of ontkend? Is er zoiets als erfzonde (non posse) of wordt juist het ‘human potential’
benadrukt? Wordt het ‘kwaad’ sowieso ontkend? En tevens vragen met betrekking de beide partners in de zonde-relatie: Hoe wordt de menselijke ‘persoon’ gezien? Wordt God ook als persoon gezien?

Volgens dezelfde methode worden ook de theologen bestudeerd. De resultaten, antwoorden op de geformuleerde vragen, worden verzameld in een Inventarisatie Schema (Inventory Table).

4. DOEL

Daarna vindt een dialoog plaats, een uitwisseling en vergelijk van de verschillende ideeën en percepties van alle vijf bronnen, met speciale aandacht voor achterliggende motieven. Het doel is om te komen tot een eigen afweging van en keuze tussen de verschillende zienswijzen of onderdelen daarvan, teneinde tot een nieuwe formulering van zonde te komen die niet afhankelijk is van het geloof in een persoonlijke God. Kortom, het doel is om te komen tot een niet- of non-theïstisch zondebegrip, dat relevant kan zijn voor niet-theïstische gelovigen en mogelijk zelfs voor mensen die zich atheïstisch noemen en toch religieus willen zijn. Dit aanvankelijk niet voorziene doel vloeit voort uit de resultaten van het onderzoek.

5. ENKELE VINDINGEN EN VERWIJKELINGEN

Want uit de verkenningen komt naar voren dat het expliciet theïstisch toegespitste zondebegrip dat als referentie punt is genomen, door geen van de bronnen (volledig) wordt gedeeld. Zelfs bij Barth wordt zonde als traagheid niet direct gerelateerd aan God van den beginne, maar aan het ware mens-zijn dat wij volgens Barth in Jezus Christus hebben. Zonde als traagheid (Eng. sloth; Du. Trägheit) is dan achterblijven bij wie je in Christus reeds bent.

Bij Tillich (niet eens geheel anders) is zonde vooral vervreemding van wie je in essentie zou kunnen zijn. Tillich legt de oorzaak daarvan grotendeels buiten, deels ook binnen de mens, omdat mens-zijn, volgens hem, zich onder meer realiseert tussen de polen: destiny en limited freedom, je zou kunnen zeggen tussen de overmacht van omstandigheden (lotsbestemming) en een deel eigen verantwoordelijkheid. Tillich neemt expliciet afstand van het theïstische godsbeeld, in plaats daarvan spreekt hij van het absoluut-onvoorwaardelijke dat mensen onweerstaanbaar passioneer (ultimate concern). Toch kan Tillich schijnbaar onveranderd van God blijven spreken op basis van zijn symbool leer. De persoonlijke God is het hoogst denkbare symbool voor dat wat ons absoluut aanspreekt. Zo gezien kan Tillich’s type van religie worden gekenschetst als symbolisch theïsme.

Bij de bestudeerde New Age bronnen is theïsme geheel vervangen door pan-en-theïsme (Roberts, Fox) of door a-cosmisch pan-theïsme (A Course in Miracles). Volgens De Cursus in Wonderen (ACiM) en met enige reserve ook volgens Roberts is er slechts één werkelijkheid, namelijk de ene, goddelijke of spirituele werkelijkheid die zich manifesteert in eenheden van creatief bewustzijn. Bij Roberts zijn deze eenheden verbonden in netwerken en hoe ruimer en wijder het netwerk, des dichter men komt bij “Alles Dat Is” (All-That-Is), hetgeen Roberts’ equivalent is voor God, een soort totaal bewustzijn, maar waarvan elk deel bewustzijn onderdeel is. In ACiM worden alle “denk-geesten” (minds) gezien als extensies van God, die samen met hun goddelijke oorsprong één onverbrekelijke, zuiver spirituele “broederschap” vormen.
Wat in beide geloof-systemen van belang is m.b.t. de notie ‘zonde’ is, dat er van enig god-menselijk tegenover of dualisme geen sprake is en ook niet kan zijn. Want enerzijds is er bij beide geen goddelijke persoon of adres tegen wie of wat iets kwaads gedaan of gedacht zou kunnen worden. “There is no personal God-individual” aldus Roberts, geen Gods-persoon. Anderzijds is er ook geen identificeerbare, individueel menselijke persoon, die als dader zou kunnen worden aangewezen. Want jouw spirituele, wezenlijke zelf – dat is: je ware identiteit - is goddelijk, terwijl je zich als ego gedragende persoon, die je naar buiten toe manifesteert, nog geen fractie is van wie je echt bent. In beide denkwijzen wordt de betekenis van kwaad of zonde ontkracht of gedetoneerd, hetzij als illusie \((ACiM)\), of als uiterst beperkte \((on)\)wijsheid (Roberts).

Fox is een opmerkelijke uitzondering. Hij is even stellig in zijn afwijzing van theïsme als van erfzonde. Door zijn radicale afwijzing van de erfzondeleer en de daar mee samenhangende kritiek op de ‘Zondeval/Verlossing-traditie’ \((Fall/Redemption\text{-}tradition)\) maakte hij ooit naam met zijn provocerende boek \textit{Original blessing} (1983). Maar dit betekent niet dat Fox sowieso de realiteit van zonde ontkent. In tegendeel, door mensen bedreven zonde is bij hem zelfs het enige kwaad (\textit{evil}) dat hij als kwaad erkent (in tegenstelling b.v. tot de ‘natuur’ die bij Fox zelfs met de ergste natuurrampen geen ontologisch ‘kwaad’ doet). Anders dan bij Roberts en in \textit{ACiM}, is er bij Fox dus wel degelijk een aanwijsbare, verantwoordelijke menselijke persoon als actor van zonde, maar dit (zondige of religieuze) kwaad is bij hem primair gericht tegen de geschapen wereld, niet tegen een theistisch opgevatte God. Is het dan wel zonde te noemen? – als we zonde definiëren in de trant van Plantinga, als op welke wijze dan ook ‘anti Deum’? Het antwoord hierop is ‘Ja’, want de wereld is voor Fox de, door Gods eeuwig Woord \textit{(Dabar)} of door de \textit{Cosmic Christ} in het leven geroepen en blijvend bezielde, schepping van God. Fox, gewezen Katholiek, ziet de hele schepping als ‘sacrament’ en kiest zo voor onversneden pan-en-theïsme of cosmo-theïsm. Hierdoor wordt vergrijp tegen de schepping sowieso ook vergrijp tegen God. Zonde bij Fox is het niet respecteren, niet mee-creëren of niet mee-vieren en opnieuw geboorte geven aan de mystieke binnenkant van de geschapen werkelijkheid.

\textbf{6. Probleem van commensurabiliteit}

De balans opmakend doet het volgende probleem op: In hoeverre is het mogelijk om deze verschillende en uiteenlopende visies überhaupt met elkaar te vergelijken, of er een zinnig gesprek over te voeren: zowel theologisch, als antropologisch?

Opmerkelijk genoeg blijken de grootste verschillen niet eens theologisch van aard, want niet te liggen aan de kant van het eventuele object van de zonde, tegen wie of wat de zonde zou zijn gericht. Door alle vijf bronnen wordt een, ten opzichte van het uiterlijk bestaan, transcendentale of (hoe dan ook omschreven) goddelijke of spirituele werkelijkheid voorgesteld, die ten minste beaamd moet worden. Tevens wordt die te beamen hogere werkelijkheid door allen (!) gesitueerd binnen het bereik van de lagere of uiterlijke werkelijkheid, dus als een vorm van ‘immanente transcendentie’. Dit geldt zelfs bij Barth, met de restrictie dat het conform zijn \textit{en/an-hypostasis}\text{-}leer wel exclusief is geconcentreerd in Jezus Christus, nl. als Gods eeuwige Woord (Christus) in deze mens (Jezus).

Vergeleken met de theologische, zijn de antropologische verschillen lastiger en meer uiteenlopend. Bij Roberts is individuele identiteit volstrekt ongrijpbaar: wie
een mens is, is in ieder geval niet gelegen in de uiterlijke zichtbare ego-persoon. In ACiM wordt elke vorm van scheiding (separation) gezien als illusie. Daarmee wordt alleen al de gedachte reeds buiten beeld gehouden, dat een mens als zelfstandige persoon vijandig of zelfs maar met een zekere distantie, tegenover een ander mens of tegenover God zou kunnen handelen. Er is volgens de Cursus in Wonderen slechts één harmonisch-monistische werkelijkheid van geestelijke broederschap en de rest is illusie. Het type wonderen dat de Cursus haar leerlingen wil leren - in het bijzonder het wonder van de vergeving - is om een schijnbare agressor te blijven zien als wat hij werkelijk is, nl. een broeder en niets anders.

Door Barth wordt de individuele persoon als buitengewoon verantwoordelijk en capabel voorgesteld met betrekking tot zijn/haar zondige traagheid. Maar omgekeerd, een verantwoordelijke persoon met de ‘human potential’ om actief het goede te doen en het ware menszijn in eigen leven te realiseren, wordt door Barth buiten de figuur Jezus Christus niet erkend. In zekere zin schetst Barth de zondige helft als de hele menselijke persoon. Alleen Tillich in beperkte zin (limited freedom) en in sterkere mate Fox, zien de mens als identificeerbare verantwoordelijke persoon, met ‘potentie’ hetzij ten kwade of ten goede.

Om nu te midden van deze antropologische divergenties enig houvast en duidelijkheid te krijgen, bleek het zinnig om de belangrijkste, historische persoons-concepten te verkennen, al was het alleen maar ter oriëntatie, maar ook in de hoop een antropologie te vinden waarmee zoveel mogelijk verschillende aspecten vanuit de onderzochte bronnen kunnen worden verbonden.

Een dergelijke mens- of persoonsleer moet tenminste twee aspecten in zich verbinden:

Ten eerste, conform alle vijf bronnen, zij het slecht gedeeltelijk wat betreft Barth:

1. Degene of datgene waartegen gezondigd wordt (het transcendent, God, geest, hoger principe, iets absoluuts ...) moet een plek krijgen binnen de antropologie

Ten tweede, tegenover Roberts en ACiM; en deels tegenover Barth:

2. Er moet in deze mens- of persoonsleer sprake zijn van een aanwijsbaar individu, een mens met een persoonlijke identiteit, die aanspreekbaar en verantwoordelijk is als subject van hetzij kwaad dan wel goed.

7. Mensbeeld van Scheler

Bij het onderzoek naar en vergelijken van belangrijke persoons-concepten kwam de metafysische antropologie van Max Scheler als een verrassing naar voren, want onverwacht bruikbaar om meerdere redenen. Ten eerste is er structurele overeenkomst met de bronnen: nl in de erkenning van twee lagen in de mens. Ten tweede is er bij Scheler afstemming met overige wetenschappen in het bijzonder met biologisch-evolutionaire inzichten, zonder dat hij daar kritiekloos in mee gaat. Ten derde kan Scheler’s persoonsbegrip evengoed samengaan met een Christelijk-theologische visie op menszijn, als ook met een meer humanistisch-metafysische benadering. Volgens Scheler komt de mens enerzijds op uit het dierenrijk (de mens is één van hen), maar, anders dan de dieren is de mens bovendien begiftigd met een principe van elders. Dit principe werd door Scheler eerst afgeleid van God; en later van de Grund des Seins. Het is dit principe van elders, door Scheler ‘G/geest’ (Geist) genoemd, dat het dier ‘mens’ tot menselijke persoon maakt, of anders gezegd: de psychisch-
fysieke verschijning mens wordt het eindige persoons-centrum in wie het principe ‘G/geest’ verschijnt en door wie dit principe wordt geregisseerd. De winst van de mensvisie van Scheler is, kortgezegd, dat de ‘geest-gedreven menselijke persoon’ (spirit-based human person) getekend wordt als de ontmoetingsplaats waar twee dimensies samenkomen: God en schepping, of de geestelijke en de fysieke wereld, het absolute en het geconditioneerde, het innerlijk zelf en het uiterlijk ego … Waar deze twee dimensies samenkomen, begint het ook te ‘vonken’, hetgeen soms leidt tot kortsluiting (zonde) of tot het schijnen van weldadig licht (het goede doen).

8. HERFORMULERING VAN HET ZONDEBEGRIP

In het laatste deel (IV) van de studie vindt de onder het kopje ‘doel’ geformuleerde afweging plaats van de verschillende visies van de bronnen en wordt een keuze gemaakt tussen onderdelen daarvan, waarbij het persoonsbegrip van Scheler wordt gebruikt als leidraad (§ 11). In de slotparagraaf (§ 12) worden de keuzes en conclusies aangewend om tot een post-theïstische zondeleer te komen. Deze is als volgt geformuleerd:

Zonde is spirituele zelf-verloochening door je wezenlijke Z/zelf te vergeten. i.e.: zonde is spirituele luiheid of traagheid, verwaarlozing van je eigen ‘geest’.

Verschillende aspecten vanuit of in reactie op de bronnen komen hierin terug:

1. ‘geest’ als immanente transcendentie (conform alle bronnen)
2. in het begrip ‘G/geest’ kunnen God en mens beide worden gedacht (‘geest’ in plaats van ‘persoon’ als god-menselijke verbindingsbegrip)
3. het element van oppositie (Barth), maar niet tegenover een verre of buiten de concrete mens gelegen instantie, maar tegenover iets transcendentals in jezelf (Roberts, ACiM, Fox, Tillich)
4. het element van een aanspreekbare, verantwoordelijke menselijke persoon, rehabilitatie van het ego (contra Roberts, ACiM)
5. zonde als traagheid (Barth, Fox) en als vervreemding (Tillich)

In het slothoofdstuk worden ook kort de winst en het verlies van dit non-theïstische concept besproken.
Zusammenfassung

Sündigen: Gegen wen oder was? (gegen jemanden oder gegen etwas?)
Eine Einordnung der Sichtweisen von Barth und Tillich in Bezug auf Sünde und Heiligung, im Vergleich zu Sichtweisen von New Age-Autoren


1. Einleitung


Gott und Mensch voneinander trennt und antagonistisch gegeneinander stellt; und
dass die traditionelle Sündenlehre zudem den menschlichen Kredit vernachlässigt.
Dieser doppelte Vorwurf, der bei New Age-Autoren explizit oder implizit fast immer
vorhanden ist, ist der Ausgangspunkt für die allgemeine Arbeits- oder Forschungs-
Frage dieser Dissertation. Diese Frage lautet: Ist der erwähnte doppelte Vorwurf
richtig in Bezug auf zwei wichtige und mehr oder weniger komplementäre Theologen
des letzten Jahrhunderts, nämlich Barth und Tillich?

2. Motiv
Die Arbeitsfrage ist weder das eigentliche Ziel noch das tiefste Motiv dieser
Studie. Man kann im Voraus schon fast vermuten, dass Barths Denken weiter von
der New Age-Spiritualität entfernt ist als das von Tillich. Die Arbeitsfrage dient der
systematischen Reflexion der Sündenlehre und der mit ihr verbundenen Fragen. Dabei
stellt sich die Frage, welches Menschenbild (Anthropologie) und welches Bild von
Gott eine Rolle spielen (Theologie/Gottesbild), und wie von dort aus das Verhältnis
Gott-Mensch betrachtet wird (Religion/Spiritualität). Menschliche Beziehungen und
Erfahrungen werden in der Regel tief durchdacht und erforscht in Bezug auf Probleme
oder wenn eine Beziehung unter Druck steht. In Bezug auf die religiöse
Beziehung und deren Erleben geht es dann um die Sündenlehre.

Das eigentliche Motiv, sich mit dem Thema der Sünde auseinanderzusetzen, ist
die Überlegung, dass mit diesem alten Konzept eine tiefere Dimension des Menschseins
angesprochen wird, die nicht nur mehr umfasst als moralisch gut/schlecht, oder
rechtlich erlaubt/verboten, sondern die auch über den Glauben/Unglauben an einen
persönlichen Gott hinausgeht. Der Begriff der Sünde ist religionsgeschichtlich mit
dem Begriff ‘Tabu’ verbunden und mit den Unterscheidungen rein/unrein, heilig/
profan, die Seele bewahren oder verkaufen. Sünde hat mit einer persönlich-spirituellen
Grenze zu tun, die nicht automatisch mit Ethik oder Rechtsprechung übereinstimmt.
Es betrifft eine weitreichende Grenze, die man als Mensch unbedingt oder eher absolut
nicht überschreiten sollte, unter Strafe von ...?

Hiermit sind die wichtigsten Assoziationen und Fragen zum Begriff der Sünde
aufgezeigt, nämlich: Welche wichtige „Grenze“ ist gemeint? Und, was sind die
Konsequenzen, wenn diese entscheidende Grenze (nicht) respektiert wird? Besonders
die erste Frage spiegelt sich im Titel dieser Arbeit wider, die sich auf Sündigen gegen
Jemand oder Etwas bezieht. (Sünde: Gegen wen oder was?)

3. Forschung
Was beiläufig suggeriert wurde – dass Sünde nicht einmal gleichbedeutend
ist mit dem Glauben/Unglauben an einen persönlichen Gott – weicht implizit
von der Definition von Sünde ab, die als Ausgangspunkt dient, ist aber eine der
Schlussfolgerungen der Untersuchung. Um dorthin zu gelangen, wird folgender Kurs
geschlagen.
Mit Plantingas Formel als Bezugspunkt werden zunächst drei ausgewählte
New Age-Quellen untersucht: Jane Roberts (die sog. Seth-Bücher), A Course in
Miracles (ACIM) und das Werk des ehemaligen Dominikanermönchs und Priesters
Matthew Fox. Ihr Denken über die Beziehung zwischen Mensch und Gott wird von
drei miteinander verbundenen Perspektiven aus untersucht, nämlich: Kosmologie
(Verhältnis Gott-Mensch), Hamartiologie (das Denken über Sünde und das Böse),

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Nach der gleichen Methode wird auch das Denken der Theologen untersucht. Die Ergebnisse und Antworten auf die formulierten Fragen werden in einem Inventurplan gesammelt (Inventartabelle).

4. ZIEL


5. EINIGE ENTFDECKUNGEN UND VERSTRICKUNGEN

Aus den Untersuchungen geht hervor, dass das explizit theistische Konzept der Sünde, das als Bezugspunkt diente, von keiner der Quellen (vollständig) geteilt wird. Auch bei Barth ist die Sünde als Trägheit nicht von Anfang an mit Gott verbunden, sondern mit dem wahren Menschen, das wir nach Barth in Jesus Christus haben. Sünde als Trägheit (engl. sloth) bedeutet dann, hinter dem zurückzubleiben, was man bereits in Christus ist.

Bei Tillich (noch nicht einmal so anders) ist Sünde hauptsächlich die Entfremdung von dem, was man im Wesentlichen sein könnte. Tillich sieht die Ursache dafür größtenteils außerhalb des Menschen, teils auch innerhalb, da sich das Menschsein nach Tillich zwischen zwei Polen vollzieht: Schicksal und begrenzte Freiheit, man könnte auch sagen zwischen Übermacht und einem Teil eigener Verantwortung. Tillich distanziert sich explizit von der theistischen Sichtweise und spricht stattdessen vom absolut Bedingungslosen (das Unbedingte), das Menschen unbedingt angeht (ultimate concern) oder unwiderstehlich mitreißen (ultimative Sorge). Aufgrund seiner Symbollehre kann Tillich anscheinend weiterhin von Gott sprechen. Der ‘persönliche Gott‘ ist das höchste denkbare Symbol für das, was uns absolut anspricht. In diesem Sinne kann Tillichs Art der Religion als symbolischer Theismus bezeichnet werden.

In den untersuchten New Age-Quellen wurde der Theismus gänzlich durch Panentheismus oder durch Kosmotheismus ersetzt (Roberts, Fox) oder durch akosmischen Pantheismus (A Course in Miracles). Nach Ein Kurs in Wundern (ACiM), und mit einiger Zurückhaltung auch nach Roberts, gibt es nur eine Wirklichkeit, nämlich die eine göttliche oder spirituelle Wirklichkeit, die sich in Einheiten des

In beiden Glaubenssystemen ist es wichtig, dass es hinsichtlich des Begriffs ‘Sünde’ kein Gegenüber Gott-Mensch bzw. keinen Dualismus gibt und auch nicht geben kann. Denn einerseits gibt es in beiden Fällen keine göttliche Adresse oder Person, an die oder der etwas Böses angetan oder zugeschrieben werden könnte. “Es gibt kein persönliches Gott-Individuum“ (There is no personal God-individual), so Roberts. Andererseits gibt es auch keine identifizierbare, individuelle menschliche Person, die als Täter bezeichnet werden könnte. Denn das spirituelle, wesentliche Selbst – also: die wahre Identität – ist göttlich, während die sich als Ego verhaltende Person, die sich nach außen hin manifestiert, nicht einmal ein Bruchteil dessen ist, wer sie wirklich ist. In beiden Denkweisen wird die Bedeutung des Bösen oder der Sünde entkräftet oder gesprengt, sei es als Illusion (ACiM) oder als äußerst begrenzte (Un) Weisheit (Roberts).


**6. Problem der Verhältnismässigkeit**

Bei der Bestandsauffnahme ergibt sich folgendes Problem: Inwieweit ist es möglich, diese verschiedenen und divergierenden Sichtweisen überhaupt zu vergleichen oder sinnvoll zu diskutieren, sowohl theologisch als auch anthropologisch?

Bemerkenswerterweise scheinen die größten Unterschiede nicht einmal theologischer Natur zu sein, denn sie liegen nicht auf der Seite des möglichen Objekts der Sünde – gegen wen oder was die Sünde gerichtet wäre. Alle fünf Quellen weisen in Bezug auf die äußere Existenz eine transzendentale oder (wie auch immer definierte)
göttliche oder spirituelle Realität auf, die zumindest bestätigt werden muss. Gleichzeitig verorten alle (!) Quellen die zu bestätigende Realität im Bereich der niederer oder äußerer Wirklichkeit, also als eine Form der 'immanenten Transzendenz'. Dies gilt sogar für Barth, mit der Einschränkung, dass dies nach seiner En/Anhypostasie-Lehre ausschließlich auf Jesus Christus konzentriert ist, nämlich als Gottes ewiges Wort (Christus) in diesem Menschen (Jesus).

Im Vergleich zu den theologischen Unterschieden sind die anthropologischen schwieriger und vielfältiger. Bei Roberts ist die individuelle Identität gänzlich ungreifbar: Wer ein Mensch ist, ist jedenfalls nicht an der äußerlich sichtbaren Ego-Person orientiert. In ACiM wird jede Form der Trennung (separation) als Illusion betrachtet. Schon allein die Vorstellung, dass eine Person als unabhängige Person feindselig oder sogar mit einer gewissen Distanz zu einem anderen Menschen oder gegenüber Gott handeln könnte, wird somit aus dem Bild herausgehalten. Nach Ein Kurs in Wundern gibt es lediglich eine harmonisch-monistische Realität spiritueller Brüderlichkeit, der Rest ist Illusion. Die Art der Wunder, die die Schüler im Kurs erlernen können – insbesondere das Wunder der Vergebung – besteht darin, einen scheinbaren Angreifer weiterhin als das zu sehen, was er wirklich ist, nämlich ein Bruder und nichts anderes.


Um in diesen anthropologischen Unterschieden Halt und Klarheit zu finden, erwies es sich als nützlich, die wichtigsten historischen Menschenbilder zu beleuchten, sei es zur Orientierung, vor allem aber in der Hoffnung, eine Anthropologie zu finden, mit der möglichst viele unterschiedliche Aspekte aus den untersuchten Quellen verknüpft werden können. Eine solche Menschen- oder Personenlehre muss mindestens zwei Aspekte in sich vereinen:

Erstens, nach allen fünf Quellen, wenn auch nur teilweise, was Barth betrifft:

1. Demjenigen (Person oder Objekt), wogegen gesündigt wird (das Transzendente, Gott, Geist, höheres Prinzip, etwas Absolutes ...) wird ein Platz in der Anthropologie eingeräumt

Zweitens, gegenüber Roberts und ACiM; und teils gegenüber Barth:

2. In dieser Menschenlehre muss es ein identifizierbares Individuum geben, einen Menschen mit einer persönlichen Identität, der als Subjekt des Guten und Bösen ansprechbar und verantwortlich ist.

7. DAS MENSCHENBILD VON SCHELER

Erkenntnissen, ohne dass er dabei unkritisch wäre. Drittens kann Schelers Menschenbild genauso gut mit einer christlich-theologischen Sichtweise der Menschheit verbunden werden, wie mit einem eher humanistisch-metaphysischen Ansatz. Nach Scheler kommt der Mensch einerseits aus dem Tierreich (der Mensch ist eines davon), ist aber im Gegensatz zu Tieren mit einem Prinzip von anderswo ausgestattet. Dieses Prinzip leitet Scheler erst von Gott ab, und später vom *Grund des Seins*. Es ist dieses Prinzip von anderswo, von Scheler *Geist* genannt, das das Tier ‘Mensch’ zu einer menschlichen Person macht, oder mit anderen Worten: Das psycho-physische Erscheinungsbild des Menschen wird zum endlichen persönlichen Zentrum, in dem das Prinzip *Geist* erscheint und wodurch dieses Prinzip repräsentiert wird. Der Nutzen von Schelers Menschenbild liegt darin, dass die ‘geistgestützte menschliche Person’ als Treffpunkt markiert ist, an dem zwei Dimensionen zusammenkommen: Gott und Schöpfung, oder die geistige und die physische Welt, das Absolute und das Konditionierte, das innerliche Selbst und das äußerliche Ego ... Wo diese zwei Dimensionen aufeinandertreffen, beginnt es auch zu „funken“, was manchmal zum Kurzschluss (Sünde) oder zum Leuchten von wohltuendem Licht (Gutes tun) führt.

8. Neudefinition des Begriffs der Sünde

Im letzten Teil der Studie (IV) wird die oben (sehe 4. Ziel) formulierte Bewertung der verschiedenen Sichtweisen der Quellen vorgenommen. Zudem wird eine Auswahl zwischen deren Elementen getroffen, wobei der Personenbegriff von Scheler als Leitlinie hinzugezogen wird (§ 11). Im letzten Abschnitt (§ 12) werden die Entscheidungen und Schlussfolgerungen eingesetzt, um zu einer post- oder non-theistischen Sündenlehre zu gelangen. Diese lautet folgendermaßen:

Sünde ist Selbstverleugnung, indem man sein wesentliches Selbst vergisst;
Das heißt: Sünde ist spirituelle Trägheit oder Faulheit; Vernachlässigung des eigenen spirituellen Selbst.

Darin spiegeln sich unterschiedliche Aspekte von oder als Reaktion auf die Quellen wider:

1. „Geist“ als immanente Transzendenz (nach allen Quellen)
3. Das Element der Opposition (Barth), aber nicht gegenüber einer fernen oder außerhalb des konkreten Menschen gelegene Instanz, sondern zu etwas (Transzendentem) innerhalb jedem selbst (Roberts, *ACIM*, Fox, Tillich)
4. Das Element des ansprechbaren, verantwortlichen Menschen, Rehabilitation des Ego (gegen Roberts, *ACIM*)
5. Sünde als Trägheit (Barth, Fox) und als Entfremdung (Tillich)

Das letzte Kapitel behandelt auch kurz den Gewinn und Verlust des non-theistischen Konzepts.
Abbreviations

ACiM A Course in Miracles, author anonymous
Borchert Encyclopedia of Philosophy (edited by Borchert)
CCC The Coming of the Cosmic Christ, M.Fox
CD Church Dogmatics, K.Barth
CDH Creativity: Where the Divine and the Human meet, M.Fox
CtB The Courage to be, P.Tillich
DGWE Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism
ENGW Ergänzungs- und Nachlassbände zu den GW, P.Tillich
EoR Encyclopedia of Religion (edited by Mircea Eliade)
GW Gesammelte Werke, P.Tillich
HDTG Handbuch der Dogmen- und Theologiegeschichte
HWdPh Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie
ibid. ibidem; actually a repetition of the previous reference
KD Kirchliche Dogmatik, K.Barth
NPR The Nature of Personal Reality, Jane Roberts
OB Original Blessing
o.c. op. cit., opus citatum
ODCC The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church
Routledge Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy
SM The Seth Material, Jane Roberts
SS Seth Speaks, Jane Roberts
ST Systematic Theology, P.Tillich
ThWNT Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testaments
WuGl Wort und Glaube, G.Ebeling
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Curriculum vitae

Fokko Frederik Omta (1956) was born in the Noordoostpolder on a farm. After passing his Gymnasium b exam in Emmeloord, he studied theology at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. Upon graduating (1984) he served as a minister in Sexbierum, Slootdorp, and Krabbendam. Since 2008 he has been associated with the Fenixkerk (PKN) in Nieuwe Niedorp and teaches religion at the elementary school. He is married and has three sons.