

Week 4: God and Existence

- J. Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, London 1966, ch. 3
- D. Ford (ed.), *The Modern Theologians*, Oxford ²1997, Part I, Section B (pp. 67ff.)
- M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Oxford 1962

Introduction: God and Existence

- Why God and existence?
- Existence = human existence
- The specific character of the quest for human nature: subject and object are the same.
- Christianity fundamentally about human salvation - thus related to human 'existence'.

Introduction II

- Core message about human enslavement and liberation (sin - salvation)
- Relation to 'cosmological' ideas (creation)?
- Apologetic element: sidestepping of scientific challenges of religion.

Introduction III

- Traditional heritage: Martin Luther
- From *Larger Catechism*:
- *The confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust be right, then is your god also true; and, on the other hand, if your trust be false and wrong, then you have not the true God; for these two belong together faith and God. That now, I say, upon which you set your heart and put your trust is properly your god.*

Paul Tillich (1886-1965)

- PT, *Systematic Theology*, vol I, part II
- J. Heywood Thomas, *Tillich* (Outstanding Christian Thinkers), Continuum 2000.
- J.L. Adams, *Paul Tillich. Philosophy of Culture, Science and Religion*, New York 1965
- E.A. Towne, *Two Types of New Theism. Knowledge of God in the Thought of Paul Tillich and Charles Hartshorne*, 1997

Paul Tillich II

- The existentialist principle:
- *Every being participates in the structure of being, but man alone is immediately aware of this structure. It belongs to the character of existence that man is estranged from nature, that he is unable to understand it as he can understand man. [...]*

Paul Tillich III

- *Man occupies a pre-eminent position in ontology, not as an outstanding object, but as that being who asks the ontological question and in whose self-awareness the ontological answer can be found. (ST I, 168).*

Paul Tillich IV

- Existence in Tillich has idiosyncratic meaning.
- Relation of theology and philosophy: question and answer ('method of correlation')
- Middle way between liberalism and neo-orthodoxy

Paul Tillich V

- Philosophy: 'essentialism' tries to formulate ultimate answers
- 'Existentialism' exposes those, hence is 'natural ally' of theology
- This situation is directly related to our human predicament: we are unable to give those answers and yet tempted to do so.

Paul Tillich VI

- God is 'infinite being', being itself or 'essence'
- Human beings have 'existence': finite being estranged from its infinite source
- Reflection on being leads us immediately to 'shock of non-being', our own finitude
- We need reconciliation with God, the source of being.

Rudolf Bultmann

- RB, *The Idea of God and Modern Man*, 1967
- RB, 'What does it mean to speak of God', in: id., *Faith and Understanding*, London 1969
- L. Macquarrie, *An Existentialist Theology. A Comparison of Heidegger and Bultmann*, London 1960
- A. Malet, *The Thought of Bultmann*, Dublin 1969

Bultmann II

- Starts from Kantian presuppositions:
We cannot know God.
- To remain credible theology needs to find an alternative way of doing its job.
- See God's being mirrored in his dealing with humanity.

Bultmann III

- Correspondence with a need felt by the NT scholar.
- How can the NT be understood theologically *and* historically?
- Study the effect the preaching of Jesus had on those who heard him.
- The NT witnesses transformation of human existence.

Bultmann IV

- NT is divine revelation specifically insofar as it makes God's action on human beings uniquely visible.
- The same experience is possible today.
- Theological terminology of 'sin' and 'salvation' reinterpreted in existential terms.

Bultmann V

- Some use of ideas in M. Heidegger's *Being and Time*.
- Heidegger saw human beings trapped in 'improper' existence while they were afraid of confronting their own finitude.
- By heroically confronting it, they could overcome this and live 'proper' existence.

Bultmann VI

- Bultmann only accepted the problem of 'improper' existence
- For him this is human subjection to the destructive forces of sin:
- Preaching of Jesus overcomes this in a 'supernatural' way.
- Salvation not one's own, but given by God.

Conclusion

- Existentialist theologies focus on the core message of the gospel:
- Speaking about God is strictly related to the message of human salvation from the bonds of sin.
- Major problem is formulated by Feuerbach: Could this not be prejection from human need to be thus saved?